

there  
goes the  
neighbourhood



*Redfern and  
the Politics of  
Urban Space*



ABORIGINAL  
AND TORRES  
STRAIT ISLANDER  
READERS SHOULD  
USE CAUTION  
WHEN READING  
THIS BOOK AS IT  
MAY CONTAINS  
IMAGES OF  
DECEASED  
PERSONS.

*Redfern and The  
Politics of Urban  
Space.*



**there  
goes the  
Neighbourhood**



EVELEIGH STREET  
MURAL, REDFERN  
PAINTED BY DANNY  
- JAMIE AND TREVOR  
EASTWOOD,  
AND OTHERS.

PHOTOS THROUGHOUT  
KEG DE SOUSA

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THERE GOES THE NEIGHBOURHOOD:  
REDFERN AND THE POLITICS OF URBAN SPACE

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# WELCOME TO COUNTRY

TIATI MURRA DARUGA PEMEL.  
KOI MURRA YA PEMEL NGALARINGI BUBBUNA.  
BAN NYE YENMA WURRA NANG.  
NYE DICE GAI DYI YA NANGAMI GAI.  
NGALARINGI TIATI NGALARINGI NANGAMI GAI.  
GU-YA WILLY ANGARA GU-NU-GAL.  
DA LA-LOEY GNIA TARIMI GU-NU-GAL.  
JAM YA TIATI NGALARINGI EORAH JUMNA.  
MITTIGAR GURRUNG BURRUK DA DARUGA PEMEL.  
DIDJEREE GOOR.

*THIS IS DARUG LANDS.  
IT IS THE LANDS OF OUR ANCESTORS  
THEIR SPIRITS STILL WALK AMONGST US,  
SPIRITS THAT HAVE BEEN HERE SINCE THE DREAMING.  
OUR LANGUAGE AND OUR CULTURE HAVE BEEN PAST DOWN FROM  
GENERATION TO GENERATION TO CONTINUE AN UNBROKEN CULTURE  
THAT HAS EXTENDED FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS.  
IN THE LANGUAGE OF OUR PEOPLE WE WELCOME YOU TO DARUG LANDS.  
THANK YOU*

DARUG CUSTODIAN ABORIGINAL CORPORATION  
LANGUAGE SPEAKER – EDNA (MARIONG) WATSON

# There Goes The Neighbourhood: Redfern and the Politics of Urban Space

PUBLISHED IN TANDEM WITH AN EXHIBITION *THERE GOES THE NEIGHBOURHOOD*, PERFORMANCE SPACE, SYDNEY, MAY 2009.

ZANNY BEGG & KEG DE SOUZA  
YOU ARE HERE

**T**his book has many potential beginnings. We could start with our first artistic collaboration, the *2016: Archive Project*, an artistic study of Redfern we began in 2006. The title for the work was derived from the postcode for Redfern and the projected completion date for a ten year artistic study of the changes taking place in this volatile and gentrifying inner city Sydney neighbourhood. When the project began we both lived in Redfern and were interested in documenting the local environment that we knew and loved. By the end of its first year, as art imitated (or parodied) life, we had already been displaced from this inner city ghetto to cheaper suburbs.

An alternative beginning could be the *Tour of Beauty*, a bike and bus tour that invites groups of people to visit different sites around Redfern

listening to local speakers talk about changes taking place in the area. The *Tour*, organised by the artist collective SquatSpace, has run over 15 times since 2005 and has helped foster a continuing interest in the community. Or further back still, a starting place could be Brenda L. Croft's series of portraits of Redfern and people connected to it for the 1992 Sydney Biennale. Croft's work draws attention to the unique connections between Redfern and its Indigenous population as the area began to change in the early nineties. Or fast forward to the 2008 Sydney Biennale and American artist Michael Rakowitz's drawings which trace a history of Redfern through a series of intuitive connections between the early avant-garde artist Vladimir Tatlin's approach to revolution and the Aboriginal community's approach to the Dreaming.

The starting point for all of these artworks is yet another potential point of introduction for this book – the complex life of Redfern itself. As

Geoff Turnbull writes in chapter one – “Redfern is famous” – an area in Sydney like Bondi Beach which has captured the attention of the world (but unlike the sparkling white sands of Bondi from an entirely different, and less salubrious perspective). From the riots against the death of an Aboriginal teenager during a police chase in 2005, as written about in this book, by Sumugan Sivanesan, to the dilapidated houses which line the area adjacent to Sydney’s second largest train station Redfern’s urban landscape commands interest and intrigue. Regarded variously as an eyesore waiting for development, a place of drugs, trouble and crime, a place for the young and/or poor to live and hang out, a real estate opportunity, a place of cultural pride and autonomy for the Indigenous Australia or an antiquated remnant of a more paternalistic state which invested in public housing – Redfern has many conflicting lives and meanings.

In an attempt to smooth this striated urban space the government formed the Redfern Waterloo Authority (RWA) in 2005 – identifying key areas to be rapidly developed and gentrified. Redfern was deemed of “state significance” and given the ignoble status of the only suburb in Australia to have a minister and government department designated specially to watch over it. It was to be improved, homogenized, developed, brought into heel with the rest of Sydney’s inner city - its militant history of Black Power and working class activism erased. Four years on it is possible to take stock of this process: how much has Redfern really changed? While cranes cram the skyline and new developments spring disconcertingly quickly from vacant blocks or previously neglected government owned buildings (such as the local school) when you walk down from Redfern station you can smell the camp fires from people hanging out on the street and still get asked the familiar question by someone on the side walk, “Hey sis, got a dollar?”

Redfern is changing, but not entirely as the government planned or wanted. And it was this contradiction which sparked our interest for this project. We decided to bring together a range of artistic projects which have focused on Redfern into an exhibition called *There Goes The Neighbourhood*. The venue for the exhibition chose itself – it could only be in The Performance Space at CarriageWorks, the newly renovated rail-yards, turned from a derelict and empty monument to the working class community who once laboured within its walls before closure in the 1980s into the multi-million dollar arts precinct it is today. Sibling duo, Evil Brothers, explore this history of the site in their re-interpretation of the showground Ghost Train, in their work for the exhibition. Viewers will be asked to consider the ghosts of Redfern’s many pasts from its human to urban fabric. From within this thin edge of the gentrifying

wedge we wanted to explore the contradictions, questions, idiosyncrasies, culpabilities and failures of the process.

From the beginning of the project we realized that our experiences in Redfern could not be divorced from the phenomenon of urban change around the world. Redfern follows in the footsteps of the gentrification of the Lower East Side of New York, as much as it relates to the struggle against the eviction of the Prestes Maia squat in São Paulo, or the riots over the closure of the Youth House in Copenhagen. In each of these disparate struggles we found moments of connection – whether it was the walking tours carried out by the American art collective 16beaver in New York which echo the *Tour of Beauty* by SquatSpace in Redfern, or the identification with Zumbi (the Brazilian Indigenous resistance fighter) by artists in the Prestes Maia occupation which parallel the identification with Pemulwuy in the paintings of Daniel Boyd, or the lineages of Situationist practices in the work of the Copenhagen based artist Jakob Jakobsen and our own interests in the complex life of cities. We looked from Redfern to these, and other international examples, to weave together a picture that we hope provides some insights into the complex politics of urban space.

The depth of information about Redfern specifically, and artistic interest in gentrification and urban change more broadly, seemed too much to contain within one exhibition context. We decided to invite the artists in the exhibition, along with a range of other writers and theorists, to help us explore and understand this phenomenon more deeply. The result is this book, which begins with the experience of Redfern but expands from this context to look at other international examples. This book brings together a range of new and older artworks, commissioned and re-printed articles to make a reader on the politics of space.

The book is timely as gentrification has never been so fashionable. The number of art collectives and artists whose work has focused on gentrification and that we could have chosen for inclusion within this project are too numerous to mention. Some of the more interesting works for us were those which explored the uncomfortable proximity between artists’ attraction to forlorn, neglected and underdeveloped urban spaces and their eventual discovery, commercialisation and development by cash-hungry real estate speculators. Can artists mourn the loss of *wabi sabi* in our urban landscapes, as analyzed by Elizabeth Farrelly in her article, without also confronting our own role in the process? It is this claustrophobic space that the Spanish art collective Democracia force us to explore through their work *Welfare State (Smash The Ghetto)*.



In March 2007 the Spanish government decided that El Salobral, Europe's largest slum, was to be destroyed, its inhabitants re-housed. Democracia intervened in this process, not to mourn the fate of the ghetto (which had already been sealed) but by organizing buses from the local art institutions and erecting bleachers for people to sit on and watch the ensuing destruction. The crowds were enthralled taking photos with their mobile phones and clapping as the homes were spectacularly smashed apart. This event was then displaced back into the museum by the erection of similar bleachers where art gallery viewers can sit and watch a video projection of the original event (and audience) - the seductive/destructive appeal now undermined by such an uncomfortable re-staging. It is works such as this which enable us to deconstruct the flows of responsibility and culpability between art and gentrification.

Gentrification has never been so fashionable - but like anything really in fashion - it has never been so precipitously in danger of also being completely out of date. The sub-prime collapse has burst the property speculation bubble leaving many urban development projects without the necessary cash to continue. An older work by Claire Healy and Sean Cordiero, *Cordial Home Project*, thus returns in relevance for this exhibition and book. *Cordial Home Project* - like Democracia's *Welfare State (Smash The Ghetto)* - presents us with a smashed up house, but this time its neatly stacked into layers of rubble on a gallery floor. The work explores the anxieties of a generation who are growing up without the middle class assurances of owning a home. While a previous generation may have moved out of the inner city working class areas such as Redfern for a family home in the 'burbs, many are finding in today's climate they have been priced right out of the market. The importance of finding sustainable alternatives to individual home ownership and over-priced mortgages is something Ava Bromberg and Louise Crabtree explore in this book.

Of course gentrification is not primarily about buildings but the communities who live in them. Temporary Services have made a new work, which looks at questions of community decision-making and control, inserting dialogue back into these contested urban spaces. While many government planners give lip service to community consultation, in reality people often wake up to find unwanted changes such as a new allergy producing London Plane tree planted on their street (as Lisa Kelly's contribution alludes to). Temporary Services invite people to reconsider a public sculpture at the top of Cope Street, Redfern (with a disturbing array of spikes given it was the street which the 17 year old Aboriginal boy rode down before being impaled upon a fence spike), by running a public

questionnaire on what the community thinks of the work. Small democratic gestures such as this challenge the process of community consultation and raise deeper issues of spatial and social democracy.

In another way Allan Kaprow's 1963 work, *Push and Pull: A Furniture Comedy for Hans Hoffman*, re-enacted within the exhibition, also explores the pitfalls of spatial negotiation. In this book we include the original score for the work which states, rather democratically, that inside the space of the work people can play and arrange the furniture as they like. But of course as you interact with the piles of furniture and junk left lying in the room rules may quickly emerge - has someone else created this pile of chairs? How would they feel if I deconstructed it? If there is someone else in the room - should I negotiate with them before I move things around? While Kaprow's work grew out of conceptual art practices and concerns of the 60s it acts as a microcosm of neighbourhood politics today.

The challenge for projects such as *There Goes The Neighbourhood* - which seek to bridge between art, social issues and community activism - is that they are often accused of falling between two stools: producing overly aestheticised activism and under aestheticised art. It is this challenge which Miklòs Erhardt and Little Warsaw confront in an interview with Italian anarchists whom they approached to work with them on a re-enactment of an earlier occupation of building which several years later was re-occupied as a venue for the European Biennale, Manifesta 7. The anarchists refused to participate arguing that the squat was a "lived experience" which after first being "repressed by the dominant power" would then get "recuperated in a way or other, neutralized in the form of an artistic product". The interview points to some of the challenges in mixing art and community activism - it is possible to make works which continue to activate audiences rather than fold them neatly back into an artistic and/or institutional framework?

In this book we hope to have highlighted artworks and writings which open up our understandings of spatial politics, community activism and art. The book is an initiative of You Are Here a Sydney based art collective which focuses on spatial and social mapping and works across writing, curating, publishing, art making, pedagogy and activism. Just as this book could have had many beginnings, it could also have many endings. The fate of Redfern, or other inner city locations around the world for that matter, remains uncertain. The ability of the community to fight for spatial justice depends in part on people's willingness to take an interest and become involved. We will write the end (or beginning) of this story together.

# Where Goes The Neighbourhood?

BEC DEAN

Since the late 1980s the new “venue” occupied by Performance Space (a founding tenant of CarriageWorks) was obscured by a kilometre of corrugated fencing stretching along one side of Wilson Street between Redfern and Macdonaldtown railway stations. Eveleigh, the industrial suburb still only partially exposed beyond this raggedy fence line was effectively removed from sight and memory after the railway maintenance workshops situated within its walls closed down in 1989 and the community demographic of Newtown shifted from working to middle-class over the almost twenty years of its concealment. In officially claiming part of this site – one of Sydney’s last abandoned inner city industrial complexes – for contemporary performance and art by purchasing the land from Railcorp, the New South Wales Government also publicly revealed a previously forgotten urban space (seen only fleetingly by rail commuters)<sup>1</sup>, a tract of prime, unused real estate, destined in the short-term future, to undergo significant and large-scale residential (re)development. Eveleigh’s spatial reappearing act, ushered back onto the city map by a public centre for contemporary arts, is now the subject of intense community debate about the exact nature and intention of its redevelopment, and the kind of neighbourhood that will eventually arise from its built environments.

Sitting on the outskirts of Redfern, the adaptive reuse of the Eveleigh railyards is part of a rapid project of urban renewal of the Redfern-Waterloo area that is the main subject of *There Goes The Neighbourhood*, an exhibition, discussion and publishing project conceived by artists and curators, Zanny Begg and Keg de Souza. While gentrification is a term applied to the global phenomenon of affluent families buying property and moving into poorer suburbs, *There Goes The Neighbourhood* interrogates a manifestation of gentrification that is particular to Redfern, and invites other artists, writers, architects, urban theorists, historians and community members to reflect and exchange around issues that are specific to local communities, be they national or international. *There Goes The Neighbourhood*, as its title suggests, is also concerned with disappearance and social displacement. In a suburb that is most well known around the country (via mainstream media) as a fraught, working-class area of housing commissions, riddled with crime and addiction, as well as a site of urban Aboriginal activism and the first urban land rights claim in Australia<sup>2</sup>, Redfern is simultaneously a space of timeless importance and of continual challenge and contest.

In discussing the concept for CarriageWorks, Tim Greer of the architectural firm, Tonkin Zulhaika Greer noted that they sought to find the new plans from within the “artefact” of the old building, and somehow that “traces of one generation can be reflected in another”.<sup>3</sup> *There Goes The Neighbourhood* privileges the still-living presence of community, rather than its ghosts, directly through artists as organizers, activists, social networkers, thinkers, documentary makers and agitators around the inner city areas in which they work. One of these groups, SquatSpace, have been running a *Tour of Beauty* of Redfern and its surrounds since 2005, a year after the notorious “Redfern Riots” that preceded the establishment of the Redfern Waterloo Authority. Providing a contrasting view of Redfern and The Block to mainstream representations of the suburb as a war zone, SquatSpace continue to organise speakers from individuals and organisations including Redfern Community Centre, the Aboriginal Housing Company, The Settlement, REDwatch (an independent community advocacy group), Danks Street gallery precinct and the Waterloo Housing Commission along its route. In no way claiming to present a balanced representation of the politics of the area (the Redfern Waterloo Authority are not represented), SquatSpace introduce a variety of community stakeholders, and avoid the construct of a traditional tour dialectic by encouraging conversation and collapsing the distance between speaker and audience throughout.

While artists are often sited as a stimulating or causal force in the gentrification of neighbourhoods globally (through a kind of fetishised notion of bohemian community that is often embraced as a tactic by local councils in making disused and pre-development spaces for studios and galleries to artists available over shorter terms), de Souza and Begg involve in this project participatory practices that have their roots in conceptualism and the idea of creating shared experience, as opposed to the creation of an enclave of creativity. In this vein, *There Goes The Neighbourhood* includes a reenactment of Allan Kaprow’s happening (first presented in 1963) *Push and Pull: A Furniture Comedy For Hans Hofmann*, that relies entirely on the action or inaction of audience members/gallery visitors in relation to a set of instructions, objects and space. Brenda L. Croft’s *Conference Call* photographs, made for a collaboration with US conceptual artist Adrian Piper and shown at the Biennale of Sydney in 1992, represent key members of the Aboriginal community of Redfern in relation to specific local landmarks both within and outside The Block,

emphasising a connectedness of people to place and also a sense of their surveillance within it<sup>4</sup>. Across this spectrum of performance document and documentary image-making, *There Goes The Neighbourhood* draws focus on the relationship and the active involvement of people in their spaces and communities.

Last year, for the Biennale of Sydney, US artist Michael Rakowitz removed building materials from dilapidated terraces on The Block and reconstructed them within the atrium of the Art Gallery of NSW as a model of Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument To The Third International* accompanied by a series of prints and texts. *White Man Got No Dreaming* (it's title borrowed from a book of essays by Australian anthropologist Bill Stanner from 1979) interlaced the story of Tatlin with fragmented stories of The Block. In a conference entitled *Extra/Ordinary Cities: The Dynamic of Cultural Intervention* – a satellite event of the Biennale – Rakowitz explained of this bold move, that he wanted to bring Redfern's issues to a “gallery-going public, and perhaps a different public to those who already care and empathise”<sup>5</sup>. Included in this exhibition, Rakowitz is an artist whose intervention in what is extant and still-living within a place and what is possible of an artist in collaboration with any community, is reflected throughout the works in *There Goes The Neighbourhood* – to stimulate movement, debate and understanding with urgency, so that a vibrant and living context, rather than the artefacts of its existence is able to be represented. In supporting *There Goes The Neighbourhood*, Performance Space hope to reacquaint the environment of Eveleigh's past with its community in the present.

In discussing the concept for CarriageWorks, Tim Greer of the architectural firm, Tonkin Zulhaika Greer noted that they sought to find the new plans from within the “artefact” of the old building, and somehow that “traces of one generation can be reflected in another”. *There Goes The Neighbourhood* privileges the still-living presence of community, rather than its ghosts, directly through artists as organizers, activists, social networkers, thinkers, documentary makers and agitators around the inner city areas in which they work.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Since its closure, the Eveleigh Railway Yards site was used as studio and rehearsal space by many individual artists and companies including EARTH physical theatre, Stalker Marrugeku, Company B and the Sydney Festival. Some of these organisations were invited onto the Key User Reference Group for the development of the new space.

<sup>2</sup> Aboriginal Housing Company website [www.ahc.org.au](http://www.ahc.org.au)

<sup>3</sup> In 2008 Performance Space held a forum entitled *Designing The Space* where artists, performers, designers, producers and technical staff were encouraged to share their views and aspirations for making work in the CarriageWorks Bay 20 theatre and other spaces. Parts of this recording were used by former Director of Performance Space, Fiona Winning in her 2009 Rex Cramphorn Lecture *Creativity & flexibility: the nexus between infrastructure space and art* held at the Seymour Centre in March 2009.

<sup>4</sup> Art Gallery of NSW information relating to the donation of Conference Call to the collection by Brenda L Croft can be found on <http://collection.artgallery.nsw.gov.au>

<sup>5</sup> Michael Rakowitz in conversation at *Extra/Ordinary Cities*, Bach Dang Vietnamese Restaurant, Cabramatta 23 June 2008.

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TREVOR  
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MOREE

BOY

07



KEVIN  
TWD  
BUSINESS  
D. Riley  
Riley  
T. Winters  
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D. Winters

Every Day  
Is Part Of A  
Machine  
I have found that  
to be the truth  
All My Life  
North Street

YMO...  
WOD!!

HPKILZ  
DPMB

BOOM  
RILLY  
2007

VSINK  
MINK

PRILL

RISCA  
K. M. R. C.

# Chapter 1:

*Paris, Milan, New York, Redfern...*

*I'd moved up to Sydney from Canberra in the mid 80s and it was just on the cusp of the inner city changing. Everything was becoming boutique suburbs and yuppy-ised. Redfern was the last place that it was happening to because it was considered scary. Most of the shops at that time also had big roll-down shutters and it felt like a real lockdown after dark. I loved living there because there were lots of different people. They weren't just Aboriginal people; there were working class people who had lived there for decades. It's totally different there now.*

– Brenda L. Croft

# Black Power

## in Redfern

### 1968 - 1972

GARY FOLEY

*Let no one say the past is dead.  
The past is all about us and within*

- Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker) 1970.

**O**n Australia Day 1973 Dr. Herbert Cole ("Nugget") Coombs, the Chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Affairs, Governor of the Reserve Bank and influential Government advisor to six Australian Prime Ministers, speaking at a University of Western Australia Summer School, declared that,

*The emergence of what might be called an Aboriginal intelligentsia is taking place in Redfern and other urban centres. It is a politically active intelligentsia...I think they are the most interesting group to emerge from the political point of view in the whole of the Aboriginal community in Australia.<sup>2</sup>*

Coombs' view was shared by many with an intimate knowledge of the Indigenous political movement of the day, but it was a view apparently not shared by the predominately male, non-Indigenous Australian historians who have since written about that era. The antipathy of the historical and anthropological establishment toward the urban, militant activists of Redfern seems equaled only by an apparent lack of knowledge of events that occurred in these effectively "closed" communities during the late 60s and early 70s. Attendant as a natural consequence

of ignorance of the defining events of these communities, is the manner in which historians have trivialized, marginalized and dismissed the achievements and historical influence of the Australian Black Power Movement.

Black Power was a political movement that emerged among African-Americans in the United States in the mid-1960s. The concept sought to express a new racial consciousness - people like Robert Williams, Malcolm X and Stokely Carmichael played major roles in the formation of the ideas of Black Power. Malcolm X inspired a generation of black activists throughout America and beyond, whilst Carmichael "made Black Power more popular, largely through his use of the term while reorganizing the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) so that whites would no longer possess leadership responsibilities".<sup>3</sup> The term was catapulted into the Australian imagination when the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League (AAL) under the leadership of Bruce McGuinness and Bob Maza who, galvanized by the same notions as Malcolm and Stokely, invited a Caribbean activist and academic, Dr. Roosevelt Brown, to give a talk on "Black Power" in Melbourne.<sup>4</sup> The initial result was frenzied media overreaction that was closely observed by younger

activists in Brisbane and Sydney, thus the term came into use by a frustrated and impatient new Indigenous political generation.

In Australia the “Black Power Movement” emerged as a loose coalition of young Indigenous activists active in Redfern, Fitzroy and South Brisbane in the period immediately after Charles Perkins’ “Freedom Ride” of 1965. I am particularly interested in the small group of individuals involved at the core of the Redfern “Black Power Movement”, which existed under a variety of tags including the “Black Caucus”.<sup>5</sup> This group themselves defined the nature of the Black Power concept that they espoused. Roberta (then Bobbi) Sykes said Australian Black Power had its own distinct (from US) interpretation. She said it was about “the power generated by people who seek to identify their own problems and those of the community as a whole, and who strive to take action in all possible forms to solve those problems”<sup>6</sup> Paul Coe saw it as the need for Aboriginal people “to take control both of the economical, the political and cultural resources of the people and of the land...so that they themselves have got the power to determine their own future.”<sup>7</sup> Bruce McGuinness, speaking in 1969 as Director of the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League (AAL) declared Black Power “does not necessarily involve violence” but rather was “in essence...that black people are more likely to achieve freedom and justice...by working together as a group.”<sup>8</sup> So the Australian version of Black Power, like its American counterpart, was essentially about the necessity for Black people to define the world in their own terms, and to seek self-determination without white interference.

Since the 1860s, as the Aboriginal peoples in regional areas of southeastern Australia experienced the spread of the white invasion and forcible occupation of their homelands, there was significant resistance, both passive and active. Heather Goodall notes that in New South Wales from the beginning of black/white contact “Land was seen by its Aboriginal owners as a central factor in their experience of colonialism. Their sense of invasion, of loss and deprivation of land was expressed clearly and unarguably”.<sup>9</sup> Land continued to be at the heart of Aboriginal concerns and protest over many decades, and many disputes were conducted at a very localised level.

The Indigenous political resistance of the modern era might be said to have been born with the creation of the first Aboriginal political organization, the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association (AAPA), established in 1924 by Aboriginal wharf labourers Fred Maynard and Tom Lacey. Both Maynard and Lacey had been developing a political awareness through earlier involvement with African-American and West Indian sailors who had created an organization on the Sydney waterfront called the Coloured Progressive Association. This organization had hosted functions for the famous African-American boxer Jack Johnson during his visits to Australia in 1907 and 1908. Johnson was an inspirational role model for black people everywhere because of his refusal to accept the “place” designated for a black man in the colonial mentality of the day. By 1920 both Maynard and Lacey were

members of a Sydney chapter of the largest black consciousness movement in the world at that time, Marcus Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association.

The AAPA established by Maynard and Lacey was clearly in part inspired by the Jamaican Marcus Garvey, (known as the ‘father of Black Nationalism’) and shared the motto of Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association, “One God, One Aim, One Destiny”. The AAPA stood for self-determination, economic independence and Land Rights for Aboriginal people, and its adaptation and

Upon arrival in Canberra early on the morning of 27th January 1972 the Koori men pitched a beach umbrella on the lawns outside Parliament House and proclaimed the site the office of the “Aboriginal Embassy”.

incorporation of the ideas of Garvey demonstrates a far higher level of political sophistication than white Australian historians have ever acknowledged. Operations of the AAPA were largely restricted to the north coast of New South Wales. It managed to last only four years due to intense police and

Aborigines Protection Board harassment, but the AAPA nurtured the flame of resistance, embedded ideas of self-reliance and independence, and was to have a powerful influence on the next generation of NSW Indigenous activists in the 1930s.

A later all-Aboriginal political organization created was the Australian Aborigines League, established by William Cooper, Doug Nichols, Bill and Eric Onus and others in early 1936 in Melbourne.<sup>10</sup> Membership was open to all Aborigines and the aims of the group were “to gain for Aboriginal people those civil and human rights denied since occupation”.<sup>11</sup> This was one of the first significant attempts by a group of Aboriginal political activists to try and assert control over their own destinies, although other dedicated groups emerged around then including Bill Ferguson and Jack Patten’s Aborigines Progressive Association (APA), founded in 1937.<sup>12</sup> The Australian Aborigines League never became more than a regional organisation, effectively functioning only in south-east Australia, although key members travelled far and wide throughout Australia in the 1930s to 1960s making contacts, compiling information and politically organising. However, Patten and Ferguson joined up with William Cooper, along with Marge Tucker, Doug Nichols and Pearl Gibbs to mount the famous 1938 “Day of Mourning”. This idea, inspired by Cooper, was described by Goodall as a “brilliantly symbolic plan... recognised as a turning point in capturing white attention”.<sup>13</sup> These were difficult and tough times for Aboriginal political organisers because of the range of restrictive and discriminatory state laws that controlled the movement of Indigenous people.

Just how tough it could be was demonstrated by the protracted dispute at Cummeragunja which began in 1937 and in part prompted William Cooper’s disillusionment and idea for a protest at the sesquicentenary celebrations the following year. Aboriginal residents had at first sought William Cooper’s assistance over grievances with the Protection Board manager. When Cooper’s moderate tactics of petitioning the NSW Protection Board failed, the community turned to former Cummeragunja resident Jack Patten who, on Friday 3rd February 1939, was arbitrarily arrested when he addressed the people on the reserve. Two thirds of the residents immediately packed up and crossed the Murray River into Victoria and thus withdrew their labour from the NSW Protection Board. This action has been described as, “perhaps the first direct political action taken by Aboriginal people which lay outside the guidelines offered by the established system”.<sup>14</sup> It is significant that the children of the Cummeragunja exiles were among those most attracted to the more direct action tactics of the Black Power movement in the late 1960s.<sup>15</sup>

In February 1965 Perkins and Reverend Ted Noffs of the Wayside Chapel organised a “Freedom Ride” with 30 white Sydney University students from the group Student Action for Aborigines (SAFA).<sup>16</sup> He took SAFA on a bus ride into some of NSW’s most notoriously racist country towns. They were pelted with eggs and rotten fruit when they tried to desegregate the Moree swimming pool and such was the level of violent response they encountered that the hired bus driver left the tour halfway through out of fear.<sup>17</sup> But the resultant publicity resounded

around the world and exposed the vicious nature of Australian racism in an unprecedented way. As Adam Shoemaker described it,

*Internationally inspired, a product of cooperation between whites and blacks committed to the same ideals, confrontationist but non-violent, the Freedom Ride was a consciousness-raising exercise that was very effective. Awakening media interest in Aboriginal affairs was, for the first time, marshalled in favour of the Black Australian cause, to the severe embarrassment of many white townspeople in rural New South Wales. All of these elements foreshadowed a pattern of protest that was to continue and expand in the 1970s and 1980s.*<sup>18</sup>

The Freedom Ride had the effect of inspiring a young generation of Aboriginal political activists in southeast Australia to stand up for their rights. Paul Coe and his sister Isobel had grown up on Erambie Mission in Cowra, Gary Williams and myself at Nambucca Heads, Billy and Lyn Craigie at Moree, Keith Smith at Nowra, Bob and Sol Bellear at Tweed Heads and Michael Anderson in Walgett. Lyall Munro had been inspired by the Freedom Ride when it passed through his home town, and he later said the experience enabled him to see “the power of direct action that day in Moree.”<sup>19</sup> All of these young people had then been part of the significant Aboriginal migration to the city that had occurred during the 60s. As Gale wrote in 1975,

*...Aborigines continue to move out of their isolation into the mainstream of Australian city life...[they] are no longer willing to accept the lowest position in the socio-economic scale...This resurgence of Aboriginal identity has led to a change in the patterns of race relations in this country...*<sup>20</sup>

Like most Aboriginal arrivals from the bush at that time, they began to congregate around the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs (FAA), a social/welfare centre established by community leaders like Charles Perkins, Ken Brindle, wharfies; Chicka Dixon and Jack Hassan and boxers; Roy Carrol and Teddy Rainbow. The FAA had set up premises in an old funeral parlour at 810 George Street, near Central Railway Station,<sup>21</sup> and by 1968 had become the major social congregation point for the increasing number of young arrivals from the bush and more established Aboriginal city-dwellers. It was at the social functions held by the FAA that most of the later Black Power movement met each other and began to discuss the events of the day.<sup>22</sup>

Further, they came to sense themselves as the inheritors of a long tradition of political struggle as they became familiar with stories of the legends of the Indigenous struggle such as Bill Onus, Jack Patton, Bert Groves and Frank Roberts. By 1968 a small discussion group emerged that at times comprised of Paul Coe, Billy Craigie, Tony Coorie, John Newfong, Alana and Samantha Doolan, Lyn Craigie and husband Peter Thompson, Bob and Kaye Bellear, Naomi Mayers, Gary Williams, Norma Williams, Pam Hunter, Isobel Coe and others.<sup>23</sup> This loose collective, at the behest of Coe and Williams, began consuming all they could of the political literature of the day. Paul Coe was a strong critic of what he perceived as, “...too many white liberals running black affairs. Nothing will get done until



young blacks take the initiative.”<sup>24</sup> To a man and woman these young Kooris had come to the city in the previous five years, and all agreed with Coe when he observed, “In the country racism is blatant, In the city it is more subtle. But the result is the same.”<sup>25</sup> These sentiments and the way they were vehemently expressed by Coe resonated deeply with the other young blacks. They may not have been as articulate as Coe, but they strongly related to what he was talking about.

It should be remembered that this was a time of exciting social and political upheaval in Australia and the rest of the world. The late 1960s saw student rebellion in Paris, riots at the Democratic Convention in Chicago and the emergence of the American Black Power movement. In both America and Australia demonstrations against the War in Vietnam brought together elements of black and white political activists. In Sydney people like Paul Coe, Gary Williams and myself were starting to encounter new people and new ideas. Goodall describes these as “diverse groupings of young people who sometimes called themselves ‘New Left’, but who might just as well associate themselves in Australia with the anarchist, libertarian traditions”. They were “influenced by the anti-colonial movements in India and Africa” and writers like Franz Fanon, Jean Paul Satre and Albert Camus.<sup>26</sup>

Within that context, the young disaffected Aborigines of inner city Sydney set about to raise their level of political awareness. One thing that accelerated their international awareness had been the sudden influx in the late 60s of American servicemen on Rest and Recuperation leave in Sydney. A significant number of these were the African-American troops who some said were America’s cannon fodder in Vietnam. These troops often gravitated toward the Sydney Black community in Redfern seeking solace from the prevalent white racism of Sydney. Consequently, the young Indigenous activists became exposed to the latest developments in racial politics in America, and were provided by Black GI’s with some of the latest in African-American political literature and music.

Only one bookshop in Sydney sold the type of material they were after. This was the Third World Bookshop, run by Bob Gould, a Sydney left wing identity. It was from Gould’s bookshop that the Redfern activists began acquiring their reading matter, at first by the simple and expedient way of theft, and later when Gould agreed to provide the group with whatever books they wanted, *gratis*. The bulk of the relevant literature that Gould had related to the African-American political struggle, and so the Redfern activists began consuming the works of Malcolm X, Huey P. Newton, Bobby Seale, George Jackson, Eldridge Cleaver and Angela Davis. But, as Heather Goodall reminds us, it is also important to remember that in 1969 these Redfern activists “were just as aware of the seizure of Alcatraz by Vine Deloria Jnr as they were of the Panthers...and Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee was as widely read as Soul on Ice.”<sup>27</sup>

The campaign for a “Yes” vote in the 1967 Referendum, which allowed Aboriginal people to be counted in the Australian census and removed the race powers regulation in the Australian Constitution raised expectations for change in Indigenous affairs

in Australia – hopes which were subsequently dashed by government inaction. The younger activists felt a strong sense of betrayal and cynicism at the more non-confrontationist methods and tactics of the older generation: All the effort that respected political leaders like Faith Bandler, Ken Brindle, Perkins and others seemed to amount to nothing. To the impatient young firebrands who were contending on a nightly basis with confrontations with NSW police the apparent lack of progress meant more effective methods had to be considered. As Kath Walker put it at the time,

*Looking back, the only major improvement has been the 93% ‘Yes’ vote of the referendum of May 1967; but this improvement did not benefit the black Australians though it eased the guilty conscience of white Australians in this country and overseas.*<sup>28</sup>

Thus it seemed to the young radicals that the old style organisations that had fought the referendum campaign were ineffective, especially after the referendum had delivered so little in terms of real reforms on the ground. On the streets of Redfern young Aborigines were confronted on a daily basis with the brutal reality of dealing with a racist and corrupt NSW police force. Paul Coe was motivated in his early activism by outrage at the police murder of his cousin Pat Wedge.<sup>29</sup> The same police killing had triggered a major controversy about the jailing of Ken Brindle when he demanded details of the death from police, thus the young blacks from Redfern had many reasons to be aggrieved, and believe that no progress was being made. As Peter Read observed,

*Here was the shared experience of Aboriginality. Here was the point of intersection. Foley was arrested at Central station about this time on a trumped up charge. Brindle was beaten up by Redfern police. Perkins was arrested in Alice Springs after he had rung up police to complain about a publican. What the Sydney Aborigines...understood intuitively...was the brutal reality of Aboriginal daily life.*<sup>30</sup>

Because of the degree of daily confrontation with police in Redfern, it should be of no surprise that the young radicals came to decide that the issue of police harassment and intimidation should be tackled. The young Aboriginal people of Redfern saw striking similarities in the American experience and their own communities. They began to adopt and adapt the strategies and tactics they were reading and hearing about in America. Thus when Redfern activists pondered the problem of police harassment in their own community, they were drawn to consider methods adopted by a group called the Black Panther Party of America, operating in the San Francisco suburb of Oakland, California. This was a scenario that had been predicted by older activist Chicka Dixon. In 1967 he had argued for “hostels for Aborigines because of this mass migration of teenagers from the river banks to Sydney” and pointed out that an “explosion point was coming”. He said that, “it’s quite certain that there are going to be race riots. There is no doubt in my mind that something has got to give.”<sup>31</sup>

The American Black Panther Party for Self-Defense’s early program called the “Pig Patrol” attracted the interest of the Redfern group. In the Oakland ghetto

a situation existed regarding police harassment and intimidation that seemed to the Australian young radicals to be very similar to their experience in Redfern. Panther leader Huey P. Newton's response to the Oakland situation had been to research California law and ascertain that it was legal for citizens to carry firearms as long as the weapons were not concealed. Armed with this legal loophole, Newton then armed the Panther's with guns and set out to "defend the black community".<sup>32</sup> In the US experience, this tactic of direct, armed confrontation with police resulted ultimately in the leadership of the Panthers being decimated, but this did not deter the Redfern group.

The basic Panther idea of a patrol to monitor police activity seemed to the group to be a good one. It was felt that by monitoring and keeping a record of police harassment of the community they might be able to build a solid database of information that they could then use politically to alleviate the situation. Thus the information gathering began one Saturday night in 1969 when young activists including Coe, Williams, Billy and Lyn Craigie, myself and others began observing and collecting information on the regular police raids against the Aboriginal pub the Empress Hotel in Redfern.<sup>33</sup>

The activists monitoring of the police had resulted in increased attention from the police toward the activists. The notorious NSW Police squad, the 21 Division, originally created in the 1930s as an early form of paramilitary unit to deal with the Darlinghurst "Razor Gangs" of that era, suddenly began to have a presence in Redfern and the level of police harassment of the community increased. The police Crime Surveillance Unit secretly compiled a dossier on the "Black Power Group" in which detailed information on key activists was combined with the records of Aboriginal bank robbers to accentuate the implied criminality of the group. The document, which was distributed to all police stations in NSW, called on all districts to be alert for any of the people named in the dossier and that their presence and activities should be immediately reported to the central office of the Crime Surveillance Unit in Sydney.<sup>34</sup>

Within a matter of months Aboriginal activists collected extensive evidence of arbitrary arrests, beatings, wrongful imprisonment and other serious allegations. As Paul Coe had in the interim begun his studies in Law at University of NSW; the activists enlisted the support of Professor J. H. Wooten, the conservative Dean of the Law Faculty to their cause.<sup>35</sup> With the support and assistance of Professor Wooten the Redfern group set about to try and replicate the idea of shop front legal aid in Redfern. Early white lawyer recruits Eddie Newman and Peter Tobin assisted in the recruitment of solicitors and barristers willing to do volunteer work once a month or fortnight. John Russell and people from South Sydney Community Aid helped to locate and secure a vacant shop in Regent Street in the heart of the Black community. A community working bee transformed the shop into a law office and early in 1970 Australia's first free, shop-front, legal aid centre opened its doors for business.<sup>36</sup>

On 29 December 1970 the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Mr. William Wentworth, announced a

\$20,000 grant (and thereby formal Commonwealth recognition) for the Redfern Aboriginal Legal Service, which he described as the "first of its kind in Australia".<sup>37</sup> The establishment of the Redfern Aboriginal Legal Service was to create a resurgence of pan-Aboriginal nationalism as a surge of confidence swept through the Aboriginal community in Sydney. For the first time Aboriginal people were being represented in Sydney courts and were defending charges brought against them by police.

## The Springbok Tour 1971

1971 was a dramatic year in recent Indigenous history as a series of events and actions rocked the Australian government and significantly strengthened the emerging Black Power movement in Redfern. The tour by the South African Springboks was but one of the events of that year that impacted on the Redfern group, others included the release from jail of Aboriginal poet, playwright and political activist Kevin Gilbert. In July 1971 the Aboriginal Medical Service of Redfern opened its doors and gave life to the political philosophies of the Black Power movement. As a self-help project, conceived, created and controlled by Indigenous people, it personified the ideals of the young Redfern radicals who had created it. So 1971 was to be an exciting and intense year for the young radicals of Redfern.

But the greatest single event that attracted the Sydney Left to the Redfern activists was the day Paul Coe gave a speech at the biggest of the Anti-Vietnam Moratorium rallies at the Sydney Stadium. Communist Party member Denis Freney described it as "a brilliant speech, perhaps the best I've ever heard",<sup>38</sup> whilst labour activist Meredith Burgmann described it as the "mother-fucker speech".<sup>39</sup> Coe criticized the protestors for being prepared to turn out *en masse* in support of the oppressed people of all other countries but Australia. Coe said, "You raped our women, you stole our land, you massacred our ancestors, you destroyed our culture, and now - when we refused to die out as you expected - you want to kill us with your hypocrisy..."<sup>40</sup> This speech made many of the leading lights of the Sydney Left sit up and take notice of what was happening in their own backyard of Redfern and Black Australia. Freney said that Coe's speech that night represented "the birth of black militancy", which in some ways for the white Left in Australia, it was.

When the South African Springbok rugby team arrived in Sydney on July 4 1971, the local Redfern activists were already intensively involved in the planning of actions against them. The location of the Sydney motel where the Springboks were to stay had been kept secret by the authorities. But by a remarkable stroke of luck it turned out to be the Squire Inn, which was virtually next door to the communal "Black Power" house that the Redfern activists had established in Bondi Junction to escape intense police attention in Redfern.

Also, a former Australian rugby player, Jim Boyce, who had played in South Africa in 1963 and had been horrified by what he had seen of the apartheid system and by 1971 was a committed anti-apartheid activist, approached the Redfern activists. Boyce had some genuine Springbok football jerseys that

The police Crime Surveillance Unit secretly compiled a dossier on the “Black Power Group” in which detailed information on key activists was combined with the records of Aboriginal bank robbers to accentuate the implied criminality of the group.

he provided to Paul Coe, Billy Craigie, myself, Tony Coorey and Gary Williams. He later said, “in wearing the jerseys, I believe they made a valid point - in South Africa you would never see a black man wearing a Springbok jersey.”<sup>41</sup> Indeed, on the first occasion the Koori men wore the jerseys outside the Springboks motel two of them were immediately apprehended by NSW Special Branch officers who had thought the activists had somehow stolen them from the visiting South African team. Craigie and myself were hustled into the Squire Inn where the NSW police paraded us before a distinctly uncomfortable group of Springboks and asked from whom had the jerseys been stolen. It rapidly became

apparent that the jerseys were genuine but weren't stolen, and the red-faced Special Branch officers were forced to eject us from the Squire Inn. This was one of the few occasions when security was breached during the tour and protestors were able to confront the Springboks face to face, and it was all courtesy of a mistake by NSW Special Branch. Furthermore *The Australian* reported that up until that point of the tour the South African rugby players had displayed indifference toward the anti-apartheid protestors, but had “showed the most obvious agitation” when “Gary Foley turned up at their Sydney motel in a South African football jersey. The newspaper went on to say that South African rugby supporters,...revere their jersey as Australians do the Digger's slouch hat. No coloured man is permitted to wear the green and gold on a football field.”<sup>42</sup>

By the time the South African rugby team left Australia, the product of the Redfern group's high profile involvement in the anti-apartheid demonstrations was a desire to keep up the momentum and confront issues of race in Australia's back yard.

### The Aboriginal Embassy 1972

In the wake of the demonstrations in Sydney the Redfern activists began seriously linking up with like-minded groups in other southeastern states. I was invited to Adelaide to assist in the establishment of an Aboriginal Legal Service and while staying at the home of Australia's first Communist QC, Elliot Johnston, met a young Northern Territory artist named Harold Thomas. We became friends and in the course of helping to organise a Land Rights rally in Adelaide and collaborated on the design of a new symbol for the Aboriginal movement. When I took Thomas' design back to the eastern states it quickly gained acceptance and became the most recognizable symbol of indigenous Australia today: the Aboriginal Flag. Further demonstrations followed in Brisbane and Sydney and Melbourne. The resultant publicity made it seem as though Aborigines were revolting in four states.

Eventually a hapless Prime Minister William McMahon decided to make his major policy statement on Aboriginal Affairs on the 25th January, the day before the national day. To make his statement so close to what the Indigenous people regard as Invasion Day was to be seen as a very provocative move, and it was inevitable that regardless of what he had to say the Black Power movement would, in the inimitable words of Denis Walker, “deliver some sort of consequence!”<sup>43</sup>

The “consequence” alluded to by Denis Walker was swift in coming. Indigenous leaders meeting in Sydney that night were outraged at what they regarded as stonewalling. By that time the core of the Redfern group discussed ideas on how they should respond to the Government's statement. Ultimately a decision was made to confront the Federal Government on its own ground. So they dispatched four young men to Canberra: Billy Craigie, Tony Coorie, Michael Anderson, and Bertie Williams with a Communist Party photographer, Noel Hazard as their driver.<sup>44</sup>

Only one bookshop in Sydney sold the type of material they were after. This was the Third World Bookshop, run by Bob Gould, a Sydney left wing identity. It was from Gould's bookshop that the Redfern activists began acquiring their reading matter, at first by the simple and expedient way of theft, and later when Gould agreed to provide the group with whatever books they wanted, *gratis*.

Upon arrival in Canberra early on the morning of 27th January 1972 the Koori men pitched a beach umbrella on the lawns outside Parliament House and proclaimed the site the office of the "Aboriginal Embassy". They declared that Prime Minister McMahon's statement the day before had effectively relegated Indigenous people to the status of "aliens in our own land", thus as aliens "we would have an embassy of our own."<sup>45</sup> Gary Williams explained to me the action was "one which in its form as a set of tents would physically reflect the typical housing of Aborigines in Australia today, and one which would be strategically placed under the noses of Australian politicians across the road in Parliament House".<sup>46</sup> Normally such an audacious project would have lasted as long as it took the Australian Capital Territory Police to arrive, but by a sheer stroke of luck this group of activists had accidentally discovered a loophole in ACT ordinances regarding camping in Canberra. It seemed that there was in fact no ordinance that prevented camping on the lawns of Parliament House as long as there were less than twelve tents. As long as the newly established "Embassy" compound consisted of eleven tents or less, there was nothing the ACT Police to do to remove the protest group.<sup>47</sup>

The inability for the Government to remove this embarrassing protest from in front of their Parliament House captured the imagination of not just Indigenous Australia, but tourists, students and local residents. Within days the site had established an office tent and installed a letterbox in front. Tourist bus operators became aware of the new attraction in town and began bringing busloads of tourists to the "Aboriginal Embassy" before escorting them across the road to Parliament House. The Koori activists would solicit donations and distribute educational literature about their cause. Local residents of Canberra would bring food and blankets and invite Embassy staff into their homes for showers and dinner. Students at the nearby Australian National University opened their union building for support activities and the mass media began to display great interest. The Aboriginal Embassy very quickly became the most successful protest venture yet launched by the Aboriginal political movement.

So strong was the support being expressed in both black and white Australia for the Embassy protest that the Leader of the Federal Opposition, Mr. Gough Whitlam, felt compelled to pay a formal visit. In early February, when the Embassy had only been in existence for less than a fortnight, Whitlam met with Embassy officials and discussed matters raised in the Embassy demands. After the meeting he declared that a Labor Government would "absolutely reverse" the McMahon Government policy on land rights, introduce a civil rights bill, overrule state laws that discriminated against Aborigines and would provide free legal aid for Aborigines.<sup>48</sup> This was clearly a major and significant breakthrough for the Black Power activists who were the core of the Tent Embassy protest action. Two weeks later when the Embassy-based Indigenous demonstrators invaded the public gallery during question time, *The Age's* correspondent, Michelle Grattan noted that "It was an occasion for stressing 'blackness' because the protestors were making a symbolic stand against all the injustices they felt at the hands of white society".<sup>49</sup>

Three months later in April the Embassy had grown to consist of six tents. Spokesperson Ambrose Golden-Brown was able to boast, "We've achieved recognition, just by being here... We haven't made the Government change its policy, but we've succeeded in embarrassing it, and we've made people think about the Aboriginal cause".<sup>50</sup> The Government responded though the Minister for the Interior, Ralph Hunt, who announced the Government's intention to introduce a new ordinance that would make it an offence to camp on unleased Commonwealth land within the city.<sup>51</sup> The next day thirty Federal Labor parliamentarians promise to take "physical action" to prevent the forced removal of the tent Embassy, and the stage was set for a Government vs Aboriginal Embassy confrontation.

On July 20 while parliament was in recess, the Government gazetted the amended Trespass on Commonwealth Lands Ordinance. Immediately after almost 100 ACT police, without warning, forcibly removed the Tent Embassy and arrested eight people including two prominent members of the Sydney Black Power group, Roberta Sykes and myself.<sup>52</sup> When the scenes of police violently removing the tents were aired on television that night it provoked a strong response in both black and white communities. While Liberal party Indigenous Senator Neville Bonner warned of "an upsurge of Black Power violence in Australia",<sup>53</sup> *The Age* worried, "the risk is that in demolishing one symbol, the Government might have established violence as a new symbol of black-white relationships."<sup>54</sup> It quickly became apparent that the McMahon government had seriously miscalculated the extent of support that the Black Power group had amassed with its Embassy protest.

Three days later hundreds of Indigenous activists descended on Canberra and held a demonstration on the site of the Embassy. The demonstration was addressed by Black Power activists Gary Williams, Len Watson, Michael Anderson, Chicka Dixon, Paul Coe, Roberta Sykes, Shirley Smith and Denis Walker. The demonstrators then attempted to re-erect the tent Embassy only to be confronted by hundreds of police. The resulting altercation saw wild scenes as Aborigines and police fought a pitched battle on the lawns of Parliament House that resulted in eighteen people being arrested and many injured. Again violent scenes on television provoked outrage in many Indigenous communities and the Black Power group called for another, bigger demonstration for July 30. Embassy representatives sought a meeting with Interior Minister Hunt but he refused to see them, so they then called on the Prime Minister to intervene to "prevent a national black crisis including bloodshed and possible deaths."<sup>55</sup>

On 30 July more than two thousand Indigenous people and their supporters staged the biggest land rights demonstration in the history of Canberra. The government had prepared for the occasion by cancelling all police leave in the ACT, enlisting the aid of the NSW Police riot squad and was even said to have put the Royal Military College on alert in case they were needed.<sup>56</sup> During an intense standoff between hundreds of police and thousands of protestors, Embassy and other Indigenous leaders conferred and decided that, to avert serious injury to the many young and older people in the crowd,

they would passively allow the police to walk in and remove the tents. The Indigenous activists regarded the action as "a great moral victory" for the movement.

By now the universally bad publicity that the Government had attracted over the Embassy affair lead the government to urgently convene a national conference of hand picked Indigenous representatives in Canberra. Aboriginal Affairs Minister Mr. Howson dismissed media allegations that the conference was "staged" and that the 66 indigenous representatives were chosen because of their more "moderate" stance. He said the group was the "true" representatives of "all Aborigines".<sup>57</sup> It was therefore very unfortunate for Mr. Howson when the conference voted to give Tent Embassy representatives full speaking and voting rights and passed a motion calling for the Embassy to be re-established.<sup>58</sup> The fiasco for the Government continued when four weeks later the full bench of the Australian Capital Territory Supreme Court declared the Trespass on Commonwealth Lands Ordinance was invalid because it had not been introduced in the proper manner. Immediately the Embassy was re-erected as the Government rushed through retrospective legislation to restore the ordinance, but was further embarrassed when prominent Queensland Liberal Senator Jim Killen crossed the floor to vote with the opposition and called for all charges against Embassy demonstrators to be dropped.<sup>59</sup>

By the end of 1972 as a Federal election campaign got under way the McMahon Government's reputation and credibility on Indigenous affairs was in tatters. Secretary of the conservative Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines & Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI), Faith Bandler, spoke for all when she said, "We've never been involved in party politics before but we've no alternative. Getting rid of the McMahon government is the goal of everyone now - it's a priority, even over land rights."<sup>60</sup> As the 1972 federal election campaign began Gough Whitlam declared in his policy speech, "Australia's treatment of her Aboriginal people will be the thing upon which the rest of the world will judge Australia and Australians - not just now but in the greater perspective of history."<sup>61</sup>

During the last months of the McMahon government the Redfern Black Power group intensified their propaganda war by establishing the National Black Theatre Company, run by one of the fathers of Australian Black Power Bob Maza. As they produced and performed their legendary political revue *Basically Black*<sup>62</sup> another Black Power stalwart, Chicka Dixon, prepared to lead an Aboriginal peoples' delegation on a visit to the People's Republic of China.<sup>63</sup> The National Black Theatre production played a highly successful sold-out season at Sydney's Nimrod Theatre, receiving rave reviews and establishing black theatre as a viable proposition. On the night of the final performance the cast, crew and audience gathered in the theatre foyer to party and watch the results of the Federal election on specially installed TV sets. Thus many members of the Sydney Black Power group watched as the McMahon government (and twenty-two years of conservative rule) lost the election to a Labor landslide.<sup>64</sup>

The era I have written about is one that to a large extent has been ignored by Australian historians who tend to gloss over or superficially analyze its importance in recent history. As stated earlier, many historians and commentators dismiss or denigrate the effect Black Power had on Aboriginal Australia. In Indigenous communities memories of the Black Power era and the events at the Aboriginal Embassy are vivid and strong and span across generations, whereas in white Australia these same events are almost completely unremembered. White Australia will never understand or begin to know the deep historical alienation and frustration that people in Indigenous communities feel, they can only begin to understand when they start to comprehend our history. Yet the history of Indigenous communities over the past forty years has been all but ignored by mainstream Australian historians.

In writing this far from comprehensive narrative about these significant moments in modern Indigenous (and thereby Australian) history, I have made but a very humble attempt to begin the long and arduous process of overcoming that ignorance and disinterest. Much more needs to be done.

Gary Foley is an Indigenous Australian activist, academic, writer and actor. He is best known for his role in establishing the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra in 1972 and for establishing an Aboriginal Legal Service in Refern in the 1970s. Foley also co-wrote and acted in the first Indigenous Australian stage production, Basically Black. Reprinted with permission, copyright resides with the author.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Kath Walker (Oodgeroo Noonuccal), *My People*, Jacaranda Press, 1970.

<sup>2</sup> H.C. Coombs, "Transcript of Q and A to University of Western Australia summer school" 26 January 1973 Coombs box 44 folder 369, quoted in, Rowse, Tim, *Obligated to be Difficult: Nugget Coombs Legacy in Indigenous Affairs*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> J.C. Albert and S.E. Albert, (eds.), *The Sixties Papers*, Praeger, 1984, p. 105. See < <http://www.umich.edu/~eng499/concepts/power.html> >

<sup>4</sup> See, "Victorian Aborigines Advancement League Statement on Black Power 1969" in Attwood, Bain, & Andrew Markus, 1999, p. 243.

<sup>5</sup> Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in NSW, 1770-1972*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin, 1996, p. 351.

<sup>6</sup> Roberta (Bobbi) Sykes, in Ann Turner (ed.), *Black Power in Australia: Neville Bonner vs Bobbi Sykes*, South Yarra, Heinemann Educational, 1975, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Coe, in Attwood, Bain, & Andrew Markus, 1999, p.261.

<sup>8</sup> Bruce McGuinness, in Attwood, Bain, & Andrew Markus, p. 243.

<sup>9</sup> Heather Goodall, 1996, p. 35.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Markus, *Blood From a Stone*, Clayton: Monash Publications in History, 1986, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> VAAL, VAAL, *Victims or Victors?: The Story of the Victorian Aborigines Advancement League*, Melbourne: Hyland House, 1985, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup> Jack Horner, "Steadfast Pioneers", *Identity*, Vol.1No.5, July, 1972.

<sup>13</sup> Heather Goodall, 1996, p. 230.

<sup>14</sup> VAAL, VAAL, *Victims or Victors?*, 1985, p.37.

<sup>15</sup> Heather Goodall, 1996, p. 255.

<sup>16</sup> Charles Perkins, letter to Mr. A.G. Kingsmill, Chairman, NSW Aborigines Welfare Board, 18th Jan. 1956, from Bain Attwood & Andrew Markus, 1999, p. 215.

<sup>17</sup> "Race Tour Bus Driver Walks Out", *Australian*, 22 Feb. 1965.

<sup>18</sup> Adam Shoemaker, *Black Words White Page: Aboriginal Literature 1929 - 1988*, St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1989, p. 107.

<sup>19</sup> Lyall Munro, interview on 'Broadband', ABC Radio, 20 February 1978.

<sup>20</sup> Fay Gale, and Alison Brookman, *Race Relations in Australia-The Aborigines*, Sydney, McGraw-Hill, 1975, p. 32.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Read, *Charles Perkins: A Biography*, Ringwood, Penguin, 2001, pp. 93 -100.

<sup>22</sup> G. Foley, "A Black Life", *Rolling Stone*, Issue 426 - Yearbook, 1988.

<sup>23</sup> Heather Goodall, 1996, p. 338.

<sup>24</sup> "Introducing Paul Coe", *The Australian*, 23 December 1970.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Heather Goodall, 1996, p. 326.

<sup>27</sup> Heather Goodall, 1996, p. 336.

<sup>28</sup> Walker, Kath, "Black-White Coalition Can Work", *Origin*, 18 Sept. 1969.

<sup>29</sup> Meredith Burgmann, "Old radicals never die, they just get nostalgic", *Farrago*, Volume 80, edition 7, October 2001, p. 24.

<sup>30</sup> Read, Peter, *Charles Perkins: A Biography*, Ringwood, Penguin, 2001, pp. 132 -133.

<sup>31</sup> Chicka Dixon, "Chicka Dixon", in Colin Tatz, (ed.), *Black Viewpoints: The Aboriginal Experience*, Sydney, Australia & New Zealand Book Co., 1975, p. 34.

<sup>32</sup> Jim Haskins, *Power to the People: The Rise and*

Fall of the Black Panther Party, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997, p. 27.

<sup>33</sup> "Black Power Group", NSW Police Crime Surveillance Unit document 1972, in Foley Collection, Melbourne.

<sup>34</sup> "Black Power Group", NSW Police Crime Surveillance Unit document 1972, in Foley Collection, Melbourne.

<sup>35</sup> G. Foley, "A Black Life", Rolling Stone, Issue 426 - Yearbook, 1988.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> "\$20,000 for Aboriginal Legal Service", The Australian, 29 December 1970, p.1.

<sup>38</sup> Denis Freney, 1991, p.267

<sup>39</sup> Meredith Burgmann, Farrago, 2001, p. 24.

<sup>40</sup> In Heather Goodall, 1996, p.267.

<sup>41</sup> Jim Boyce, "Jim Boyce", in O'Donnell, P. and Simons, L. (eds.) Australians Against Racism: Testimonies from the anti-apartheid movement in Australia, Annandale: Pluto Press, 1995, pp. 24-25.

<sup>42</sup> Dare, Tim, "The Day the Police Stole the Initiative", The Australian, 12 July 1971, p. 7.

<sup>43</sup> Denis Walker, quoted in Ningla-Ana, Dir. A. Cavadini, 90min. B&W, 1972.

<sup>44</sup> Heather Goodall, 1996, pp. 338-339.

<sup>45</sup> Gary Foley, in The Australian, 10 February 1972.

<sup>46</sup> Gary Williams, personal interview with author, Nambucca Heads, Foley Collection, 20 December 1999.

<sup>47</sup> Billy Craigie, personal interview with author, Sydney, Foley Collection, 25 July 1986.

<sup>48</sup> The Age, 10 February 1972.

<sup>49</sup> Michelle Grattan, The Age, 23 February 1972.

<sup>50</sup> The Australian, 29 April 1972.

<sup>51</sup> Canberra News, 11 May 1972, and The Age, 12 May 1972.

<sup>52</sup> The Age, 21 July 1972.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> The Age, 28 July 1972.

<sup>56</sup> Gary Foley, "Whiteness and Blackness in the Koori Struggle for Self-Determination: Strategic Considerations in the Struggle for Social Justice for Indigenous People", Just Policy No. 19/20, September 2000, p.80.

<sup>57</sup> Canberra Times, 11 August 1972.

<sup>58</sup> The Age, 15 August 1972.

<sup>59</sup> Canberra Times, 13 September 1972, and The Age, 13 September 1972

<sup>60</sup> The Bulletin, 5 August 1972.

<sup>61</sup> E.G. Whitlam, The Whitlam Government 1972-1975, Ringwood, Penguin, 1985, p. 466.

<sup>62</sup> Bryce Fraser & Ann Atkinson (eds.) People of Australia: key events in population, society, the environment, Sydney: The Macquarie Library, 1998,

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# Filming Waterloo

TOM ZUBRYCKI

*By the late 40's the Labor Party was getting out of touch. These people who'd grown up in the slums had their positions of power through the system – the party. The windscreen survey: they'd drive up in their cars, get out, and look at this place and that. They'd been sold a dream by those people saying 'root out the filthy slums'. And all they were doing worked right against their own class.*

— MARGARET BARRY, from **Waterloo**

**W**aterloo was my first film. In the mid 1970s I'd got to know one of the prime "movers and shakers" of South Sydney, Margaret Barry, and decided to make a film about her and her fight to stop the wholesale demolition of the suburbs of Redfern/Waterloo.

Margaret was a fiery and stropky agitator of formidable repute: she knew no bounds in confronting local politicians, government ministers and bureaucrats. Marg was a larger than life character who took on the establishment.

The documentary grew out of my video work in the mid-70s and the connections I'd made with people protesting against the break-up of inner-city communities. In the early 70s the Robert Askin Liberal government in NSW created a blueprint for the wholesale redevelopment of inner Sydney – replete with an expressway carving up Glebe and Ultimo, plus massive office developments in Woolloomooloo and the Rocks. The Builders

Labourers Federation imposed Green Bans, while residents sat in front of bulldozers defending their homes and communities. I was one of a small group of video-makers documenting a "class war" over the future of Sydney's urban landscape.

In Waterloo, an area adjacent to Redfern, and which has an intertwined history and geography, the New South Wales Housing Commission intended to demolish small worker-owned terraces to build 30-storey towers. In 1972 the Commission sent residents a letter saying their homes had been gazetted for resumption and acquisition. The residents, mostly post-war migrants, had bought their houses before the property boom in the early 70s, when home ownership in South Sydney was still within the reach of low-income earners.

The letter, needless to say, created fear and panic: many sold-up quickly and had little option but move west to the city's outskirts. The Housing Commission then proceeded to board-up the resumed places, some of which were squatted, others vandalised. Green Bans were imposed on the whole area and Margaret Barry started her resident action group representing those who *refused* to budge. It became a fight to the bitter end.

Waterloo has a remarkable history. It is one of Sydney's oldest residential areas, it was the home of the Eveleigh Railway Workshops, which housed a huge workforce under one roof. It was also a suburb which was very significant in the development of the Labour movement and the Labor Party in NSW. Why, therefore, did the party abandon the very people who were its most fervent supporters? How did the housing commission, a public housing authority set up by the State Labor government in the 1940s, get to the stage of evicting workers to build more public housing? These were key questions I wanted to explore in the film.

Margaret had a great sense of the past: she knew every planning scheme, every Labor premier, and every government minister responsible for this misguided and ill-conceived ideology of clearing-up and sanitising inner city suburbs. To illustrate Marg's thesis I did an extensive archive search. One gem was a Cinesound-Movietone newsreel about post World War II reconstruction that blamed the slums for health hazards, traffic chaos and delinquency, proposing the answer to all these



The "windscreen survey". Housing Commission public servant doing a tour of the "slums" of Waterloo



problems in the form of neat cottages on quarter acre blocks in Blacktown!

The contemporary footage in the film is largely about the residents struggle against the Housing Commission. Internal debates, compromises and disagreements over strategies are all recorded. Should they have taken a firmer line over squatting? Does the demand for consultation lead to co-option? What is responsible planning? Some of the interviews included Jack Bourke (head of the Housing Commission) who became the Resident Action Group's prime target, and William Mckell (born in Waterloo, Labor Premier, Governor General and key figure in the establishment of the housing commission). Both talk to the camera revealing an unshakeable belief in their own convictions. Equally bizarre is the scene where the Queen comes to open one of the towers. She gets a warm welcome from the residents while the narration points out that the cost of the rock installed to commemorate this event could have repaired several houses.

The film was finally finished in 1980 and the very first screening was at a church hall in Redfern that at that time was the office for South Sydney Community Aid. A 16mm projector was set-up at the back near the choir, and a large screen somewhere near the pulpit. The place was packed with locals – many seeing themselves in the film. Spirits were high because there was plenty to celebrate. The housing commission had only months earlier abandoned its plans for the tower blocks, and had commenced building medium density walk-up apartments instead. The houses planned for resumption had been spared, and rehabilitation of the blighted boarded-up properties had begun.

The film, meanwhile, had started its journey to festivals and cinemas. This was always a challenge for filmmakers. Back in the 70s and 80s, making films was one thing, finding audiences for them was another. (As recently as the early 1980s the Australian Broadcasting Commission refused to buy independently made documentaries). I was an active member of the Sydney Filmmakers Co-op, and our little cinema in St Peter's Lane, Darlinghurst, was the venue for independently made first release shorts, features and documentaries. People flocked to this 100-seat cinema to see films they would normally never see anywhere else. The film became a popular teaching resource in universities and colleges nation-wide for many years after it was made, and can still be borrowed from local libraries.

*Waterloo* is a record of a time and reflects the mood that infused the early resident action movement in Sydney. That movement is still very much alive today.

Tom Zubrycki is a documentary filmmaker; his latest films include *The Diplomat* about East Timor's president Jose Ramos-Horta, *Molly and Mobarak*, where an Afghan refugee falls in love with a school teacher in a country town, and *Temple of Dreams* about a Muslim Youth Centre facing eviction by a western Sydney Council. *Waterloo*, made between 1977 and 1981, is his first film.

# Making Problems for Problems

MICHAEL RAKOWITZ

**N**early one year has passed since the 16<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney, where I presented *White man got no dreaming*, a multimedia installation built with the involvement of different individuals and institutions in Redfern. I still don't know how to speak about this project, let alone write about it.

The truth is, this was one of the most complex, difficult and sad works I've ever made. For those same reasons, it's also one of the rawest and most meaningful projects in which I've been involved. For over a decade now, I have maintained a socially-engaged practice that has intersected with other fields and processes such as architecture, international trade, cooking, and archeology. I have learned that community-oriented projects require time and space to develop sincerely and organically, and I have thus mostly produced works of this scale in the city where I live, in places where I am in residence for an extended period of time, or in cultural contexts where I have a natural point of entry. This was not the case at all in Redfern: I was an outsider, in every way. A white American artist, invited through the biennale to produce a new work that fit within the exhibition's theme "Revolutions: Forms That Turn." I was fortunate enough to be working with Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, the artistic director of the exhibition, with whom I'd collaborated numerous times before. I knew her radical vision and ethical sensibilities would sidestep the typical curatorial pitfall of parachuting an artist into a foreign situation to produce work that ends up failing to reflect or establish meaningful links with the people or environment of the host city/country.

I am still not sure, however, that this is not what happened. But at least on my end of the experience, Redfern—The Block, to be specific—has granted me a kind of super power, an x-ray vision for seeing through walls to reveal the beginning, the original, the Indigenous. Redfern has changed me forever. Never again will I be able to visit American cities without wanting to know who and what lived there four hundred years ago. Never again will I be able to simply say "I'm sorry," because it has the potential

to erase things more than to fix them. And never again will I be able to listen to a public speech in the United States without yearning for that necessary moment of pause and reflection provided by the Acknowledgement of Country that I heard over and over again in Sydney.

My first proposal for the Biennale was born while visiting Tjanpi, a weaving collective based in the Pitjantjatjara Lands and Alice Springs, on a tour of art centres organised by Carolyn with Hetti Perkins, Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art at The Art Gallery of New South Wales. Invited by the collective's administrators to propose a collaboration with the weavers, I imagined producing a replica of Vladimir Tatlin's three-metre-tall maquette of the *Monument to the Third International*, built from materials gathered in the bush, as well as any recycled materials that the Tjanpi artists wish to include (like the face of a plastic doll I'd seen stitched onto one of their creations).

The idea was to focus on visionary architecture, of which Tatlin's monument is a key historic example. While often optimistically broadcasting a wish or desire, these proposals for buildings or cities are simultaneously rooted in inevitable failure, relegated to an existence on paper in the face of feasibility, politics or finances—Tatlin's *Monument*, like many others, was never built. The residual idea exists as a poetic critique of reality, a statement demanding a culture capable of enabling its existence. I wanted to conflate this western form of dreaming with the Aboriginal concept of the Dreamtime, which forms the basis of the storytelling in Western Desert painting. In reconstructing a work that was never realised and is now affiliated with a collapsed idealism, the dreams inherent in it would receive a new life through the voices and handwork of Aboriginal artists. These dreams would be extruded from their context—as ideas that failed in the face of Western capitalistic pragmatism—and stand instead as dreams that failed because we in the West refused to dream them.

This project never happened. It was rejected after six months of noncommunication by the Tjanpi administrators, due to several seemingly surmountable planning issues—plus a new problem: my gender. Most of the weavers were female. This had not been a problem when I was first invited, and my gender hadn't changed since.

Enter The Block. In March, 2008, having been advised of Redfern's astonishing history—thousands of years as a waterhole for the Gadigal people, the first site of Aboriginal urban land rights in Australia, the future home of the Pemulwuy Project—I spoke informally at the local Community Centre about past projects and my hope to collaborate on something meaningful for the Biennale. I again proposed Tatlin's tower as a place to start, a way to tell two stories that combined architectural struggles with ones for human rights, building the tower from architectural fragments of the many dilapidated local buildings. Some in the audience responded with agitation. "We tell our stories with this," said one woman, pointing to her mouth. "Not with your sculptures." Another person angrily recounted how every white journalist who set foot in their neighbourhood asking for information had twisted their words to write negative articles in the national press, which only served the ambitions of the city government. There were many other passionate responses, and I understood their reaction in the context of all that preceded me and all I embodied. After the crowd broke up, the same people who voiced their trepidations and warnings approached and invited me to meet with them a little later to speak more. "Go slow," said an Auntie. "And listen to us. Tell the neighbourhood's story."

But here I was, parachuted in for only a week, soon to return to Chicago. How could I approach this community project in any sustainable or responsible manner? And the truth is, I couldn't. As I stated before, projects of this nature require time—in this context, perhaps years. Trust needs to be built, and the Aunties at the community centre were right, one needs to go slow. In the time I was there, I listened. And I maintained this listening when I returned to the United States. I read through every document I could get on Redfern, from Gary Foley's article on Black Power in Redfern to the enormous PDF files of The Block's history provided by Cracknell Lonergan Architects, who were designing the Pemulwuy Project. I learned how the Elouera gym had been renamed for local hero and boxing legend Tony Mundine, and how activists like Teddy Rainbow started out as boxers. I saw their portraits, gloves on looking intently at the camera as if ready to throw a punch. I saw other later photos of the same men, bare fists raised in the air, at protests and marches. Many of the boxers got their start in travelling tent circuses, where Aboriginal fighters would earn a living taking on white locals. Tatlin, it turned out, was kicked out of art school and spent part of his time as a boxer in a travelling circus. And with that, Tatlin came to The Block.

Cracknell Lonergan designed the plans for building the monument. Peter Lucas, the son of Bill Lucas—the late Sydney-based architect who designed the Murawina Aboriginal Educational Multi-Purpose Centre—built the tower with help of Jonathon Shipton. And we had a local cleanup crew gut one of the derelict houses on Louis Street for timbers,

wires, walls and corrugated steel to build the tower. An extensive series of drawings, some of them reproduced here, accompanied the tower to tell some of the powerful, tragic, inspiring and horrifying stories that are part of The Block's history.

Before the tower and drawings were shown in the Art Gallery of New South Wales as part of the Biennale, they were premiered in the two-storey lobby of the Redfern Community Centre. From a mezzanine viewers could see the monument from above, where it resembled a spiral, the shape used in Aboriginal painting to suggest a waterhole or a gathering place with life-giving force. The drawings were printed out sequentially on individual pieces of paper and pinned up on an adjacent wall. As I was hanging them, some of the same Aunties from that meeting months before looked closely at the images of Mum Shirli, Father Ted, Chicka Dixon and Chock, and said to me, "Now you got it. You're putting some good stuff up on that wall." Over the next week, the drawings were taken off the wall and taken home by residents of the neighbourhood, and I was all too happy to print up extras for anyone else who wanted a copy.

Installed at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the recycled timbers of The Block stood in stark contrast to the classical architecture of the lobby rotunda where the monument was sited. The tower, leaning directionally toward Redfern, was outfitted with a transmitter that broadcast Koori Radio, boosting its signal across the Domain—and fulfilling Tatlin's original vision for a media centre at the top of his proposed 400 metre tall structure.

I left Australia with mixed feelings, not sure what I had done, but with inspiration and resolve to continue to tell The Block's story. I was pleased to hear that the Pemulwuy Project has been given the green light after years of waiting, and I hope that the community sees this as a positive step. It is true that in all gestures that seek to repair or reconcile there is the risk of enabling the ability to forget. Thus the charge must be to constantly remind.

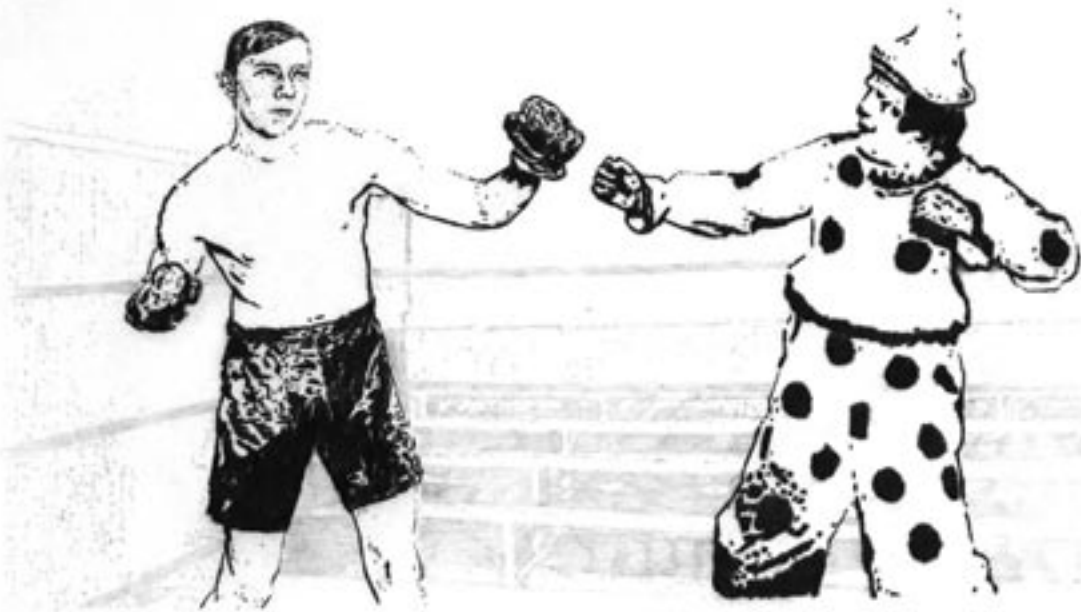
I have often believed that the best way to forget someone important is to name a building after them, so their name disappears into an address, into the architecture. I am sure that similar things have been said about the Acknowledgment of Country. But as an outsider, I was incredibly moved when I heard this preamble spoken at every public speech. I thought about my own context, as an American living on Indigenous land, taken from its original inhabitants.

To live up to my commitment to The Block, I made a promise to myself that I would continue to remind those who had forgotten. Since my return to the US, I have begun all my public lectures with the following statement:

*We acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and pay our respects to the elders both past, present and future for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of Native America. We must always remember that under the concrete and asphalt this land is, was and always will be, traditional Indigenous land.*

# White man got no dreaming...

MICHAEL RAKOWITZ



Vladimir Tatlin was one of the most important avant garde Soviet artists. Expelled from art school in his youth, he spent time wandering through Russia, earning his living working on sailboats and steamers, and as a circus boxer.



The Freedom Ride marked a turning point in the Aboriginal rights movement, in terms of media perception but also that of the indigenous population itself. Perkins later reflected, "I want to do a painting one day. If you can capture the eyes of a hundred Aboriginal people of Walgett. We're sort of looking at each other, staring into some new life that we don't understand. 'What's there? How shall we handle it? Are you scared? I'm scared, what does it mean?' That's the beginning. We knew what we had to do."



Charles Perkins, a descendant of the Arrernte, was taken from his mother at age nine. One of the most important Aboriginal activists and the first Indigenous university graduate, he organized a Freedom Ride to New South Wales in 1965 and attempted to desegregate the Moree town pool with a group of Indigenous youths. Events like this made a national figure of Perkins, who later became Secretary of the Federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs.



One of Australia's greatest boxing legends, Tony Mundine lives in Redfern and manages Elouera Gym, adjacent to The Block. Founded in 1985, the gym provides mentorship and advice for Koori youth, in part about sporting success and the wide social acceptance and respect it can offer. Aboriginal boxers today get discovered in Mundine's gym, but they once relied on traveling tent boxing circuses, where mostly Indigenous troupes took on white locals.

# Different There Now

## Brenda L. Croft's 1992 *Conference Call* photographs

BLAIR FRENCH

*It's a historical photo now — in fact a number of them are because people who were photographed have died, or the place has changed so much. I'd moved up to Sydney from Canberra in the mid 80s and it was just on the cusp of the inner city changing. Everything was becoming boutique suburbs and yuppy-ised. Redfern was the last place that was happening to because it was considered scary. Most of the shops at that time also had big roll-down shutters and it felt like a real lockdown after dark. I loved living there because there were lots of different people. They weren't just Aboriginal people; there were working class people who had lived there for decades. It's totally different there now*  
– Brenda L. Croft<sup>1</sup>

This is Brenda L. Croft speaking in 2008 about the image of Shane Phillips and Noel Collett standing near the top of Eveleigh Street, one of the four near lifesize full-body colour portrait photographs of Aboriginal subjects pictured within Redfern in 1992 that comprise *Conference Call*. The process of looking back on the work sixteen years after its making emphasises its qualities as historical document. Yet there was also a strong historical consciousness embedded within the structure of these four photographs at their time of making, indeed, within the very act of their making. That this should be so apparent in the photographs themselves is hardly surprising, given Croft's deep and longstanding comprehension of photography's impact through time as both a personal and a social practice, and in particular its close imbrication within the conflicted spaces of colonial contact, entanglement and oppression.

Insomuch as Redfern may be construed as (partial) subject of the photographs, it is very much as a social space: an everyday home; a meeting place; a stomping ground; a site of enormous cultural

richness. The centrality of the figures staring back out towards the photographer/viewer ensures this. And yet, photography of this scale necessarily scrutinises the scene, the space it lays out pictorially before a viewer. And so the photographs act also as maps to a changing urban environment, as Croft herself infers. It's this complex meshing of subject and place and the extraordinary confidence of these images as expressions of cultural strength and identity—the resolute quality of both subjects and photographs themselves staking claims to place, of standing ground—that I think on reflection first drew me to them over a decade ago. Relatively new to Australia, to Australian photographic practice, and from 1998 onwards to life as a Redfern resident, these photographs sat at the core of an extended period of research and writing on contemporary Australian photographic practice.

As can be the nature of academic writing, I drew them into a wider argument regarding the photographic image as a dominant discursive model within contemporary art through the 1990s in Australia. This overall project involved a close consideration of photography's relationship to changing conceptions of the real; to digital cultures; and perhaps most crucially to an interface between professed neo avant-gardist art practices and the all pervasive presence of the photographic image in popular and commercial visual culture. In the case of *Conference Call* I was particularly interested in what seemed to me their importance as the apparently first Australian example of what was soon to become an orthodoxy in international photo-based contemporary art: the large-scale colour lightbox photograph. By the turn of the century various critics were already deriding this convention as the 'vacuous international style' of 'lightbox photoconceptualism',<sup>2</sup> within which the 'image is the commodity'.<sup>3</sup> It seemed to me, without seeking to deny the cosy relationship of much



contemporary photography to spectacle culture and its basis in international capital, that such analysis too easily accepted the standard conception of the commodity culture of the spectacle as absolute, monolithic and constant in domination across specific cultural locations. Little space was admitted for exceptions to the overriding 'internationalism' (and conformity) of the convention. It was, and remains, my belief that such a model of the hegemonic spectacle could be productively challenged by *specific* forms of critical agency produced in the fusion of *particular* image content and form within diverse cultural contexts, such as those at the heart of Croft's work. For as these pictures demonstrate, particularities of cultural location can give rise to specific photographic images as instances of cogent social practice, even when operating within and drawing from hegemonic international image structures.

The *Conference Call* photographs were produced as part of a collaboration with African-American conceptual artist Adrian Piper, initially facilitated by Anthony Bond, who as curator had already invited Piper to exhibit in *The Boundary Rider*, the 1992 Biennale of Sydney. As Croft recalls, Piper was interested in exploring relationships of displacement between language and image at a point of nexus between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Croft was interested in working with a Sydney setting and community in particular, rather than attempt to convey something of a generalised Australia-wide perspective.<sup>4</sup> A fax dialogue developed between the two artists (who had not at this stage met). These faxes formed part of the final installation.

As the core author of the overall work Piper largely determined the form of this installation. According to Croft, Piper was 'absolutely instrumental in determining that the images would be in lightbox format'.<sup>5</sup> Croft's four images lined the four walls of the small gallery space. In the centre of the space were four leather office armchairs arranged back to back each facing one image. Glass tables sat next to each chair, each with a telephone, a desk lamp and a sign reading 'Please be seated and answer the telephone'. Viewers picking up the telephones could sit and listen to Central Australian language tapes sourced from the Institute for Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs. Thus a very clear disjunction was being created between the internationally legible register of the photograph and a traditional, quite specific language group.

The photographs were untitled within the context of the overall *Conference Call* installation.<sup>6</sup> However, they have subsequently been exhibited as Croft's own independent work outside of that original installation on a number of occasions, always with their subjects identified, and now reside in the permanent collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Without losing sight of their genesis in a particular moment of collaboration it is thus nevertheless possible to both treat the photographs as Croft's work and consider them in the specific context of Australian art and cultural history.

Each of Croft's photographs depicts one or two Aboriginal figures standing within urban environments, looking impassively at the camera. In 'Mervyn Bishop and Joseph Croft, Prince Alfred Park, Redfern' two greying, distinguished looking

men in sports jackets stand in the rather barren Prince Alfred Park near Central Station, classically framed by flanking trees with the city skyline in the distance. In 'Sue Ingram, Botany Road/Regent Street, Redfern' a young woman in jeans and khaki jacket stands at the edge of a main road. The road dips and then leads away uphill over the woman's left shoulder towards a pair of identical concrete-block office buildings, each bearing the same dominant orange lettering at the top: 'TNT'. Over the woman's right shoulder is a patch of wasteland, then an old brick factory and chimney. In 'Shane Phillips and Noel Collett, Eveleigh Street, Redfern' two young men stand at the top of a street of run-down looking terrace houses that runs down behind them. The larger of the two men adopts a strong stance—his feet planted well apart, hand stuffed into his jeans pockets, his tracksuit jacket almost completely unzipped. The smaller man stands hands-on-hips, dressed in football jersey, shorts and running shoes. In 'Mathew Cook and Bonny Briggs, Aboriginal Community Health Services, Pitt Street, Redfern' a young man and woman stand in the entranceway of an old house, he in a leather jacket, she in denim.

Even these most cursory descriptions reveal two crucial creative motivations. First, to present images of real people within or in obvious relation to the real sites and environments in which they live, work, or have some community association. Croft evidently intended the images to give forceful presence to significant individuals within inner city Sydney's Aboriginal community, and through their presence meet head on generalised negative (media-driven) public stereotypes of that community. For example the two older men are respected members of the Aboriginal arts' community in Sydney—the artist's own father (now deceased) and Mervyn Bishop, the latter generally considered to be the first professional Aboriginal photographer. The couple standing in front of the building entrance—Mathew Cook (now deceased) and Bonny Briggs—were AIDS workers who operated a needle exchange program in Redfern at the time.<sup>7</sup> Shane Phillips and Noel Collett both played for the Redfern All Blacks, a symbol of community pride. Croft's photograph was taken in the year when the team won the prestigious annual NSW Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout competition. Perhaps more confrontational to large sectors of white and immigrant Australian audiences, activist Sue Ingram wears an Aboriginal Provisional Government badge on her jacket, symbol of a movement for Indigenous self-government.

Second, Croft clearly intended the photographs to act as record of the physical environment of Redfern. The large-scale colour presentation acts to give forceful visual presence to an environment that over the past fifteen years in particular has been subject to substantial redevelopment that has both paralleled and compounded economic and social pressure on its traditional residential communities.<sup>8</sup>

Croft's own background in Aboriginal media during the 1980s, her photographic studies at that time, and her subsequent work as a writer and curator all contribute significantly to the development and understanding of her artistic practice. For instance, the complex dynamics of encounter underpinning her photography of Aboriginal subjects in street settings and in particular during public gatherings and

protests during the latter half of the 1980s informed her later more formal portrait work. The media-based context of her early activity gave rise to an imperative towards narrative and language that also informed her later photographic practice. Croft has a sophisticated understanding of both the history of representation of Indigenous peoples through the colonial period as well as of their own cultural productions. These, along with a close engagement with issues regarding representation both by and of Indigenous peoples within contemporary cultural and specifically visual arts frameworks not only inform but in part drive her own artistic practice.<sup>9</sup>

We can discern this in particular when we consider a couple of the frameworks acknowledged by Croft in her own writing. First, nineteenth-century photographic representations of Aboriginal subjects, generally produced within the paradigms of ethnography, both professional and amateur social anthropology, and an industry that developed out of and fuelled European demand for images of 'native' or 'exotic' subjects. Second, the manner in which specific dynamics of relationships between an Indigenous photographer and Indigenous subjects may inform or be manifested within resulting images.

In 1997 the Art Gallery of New South Wales organised an exhibition entitled *Portraits of Oceania* that brought together and examined nineteenth-century representations of Indigenous peoples in Australia, Aotearoa/New Zealand and Fiji, Samoa and Tonga by European photographers. The catalogue included an essay by Croft entitled 'Laying Ghosts to Rest'. Three particular modes of photographic representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subjects were apparent within both the exhibition and the catalogue.

The first is best described as an overtly ethnographic model, exemplified in the exhibition by the images made during the 1880s and 1890s by Paul Foelsche who was Inspector of Police in the Northern Territory for over thirty years. Subjects are depicted from the waist up, sitting or standing in front of neutral backdrops, generally facing and looking directly at the camera. A few of these have measuring rods at the side of the image revealing the quasi-scientific ethnographic impulse underpinning their production. Identification of the subjects is at best rudimentary.

The second is the studio tableau image, represented in the exhibition by the work of John William Lindt. Here generally unidentified Aboriginal subjects are posed amongst settings of native grasses, bushes and trees brought into the photographer's studio, often alongside bark shelter constructions and always in front of painted landscape backdrops.

Finally, there are photographs that picture groups of Aboriginal subjects in the actual environments in which they were living and working, documenting the changing circumstances of Aborigines' lives, particularly their adaptation to European settlement. The work of Fred Kruger is exemplary in this regard. He generally depicted large group scenes, supplemented with very little, if any information regarding individual subjects. But as Croft herself comments regarding images by Kruger in *Portraits of Oceania*, 'one senses a true representation of community, of people determined, by their very

numbers, irrespective of their colonial attire, or status as fieldworkers, to signal their intent to incorporate and withstand whatever changes the coming decades herald.'<sup>10</sup>

This 'true representation of community' characterises an important imperative of Croft's own work during the late-1980s and early-1990s. Like Kruger, Croft located her *Conference Call* subjects within real yet scenographic-like environments. These are semiotically laden visual environments that operate akin to Lindt's studio tableau settings in constructing and conveying subject identity via accumulations of references to lifestyle, character and experience. Mountain vistas, rocky outcrops and views across lakes dominate in Lindt's works. The city as it encloses the specific community of Redfern is the signifying environment of Croft's images. But its presence is figured differently in each photograph. In the image of Mervyn Bishop and Joseph Croft the downtown skyline is depicted as a hovering backdrop, physically distanced from the two subjects. Sue Ingram is depicted standing at the literal edge of an area once industrial land, now scarred and waiting 'renewal'. (She also stands before two high-rise buildings emblazoned with the logo of a major global transport company—"TNT"—a symbol of global business interconnectivity and communication that hovers both visually and physically above the daily activity of life in Redfern. This is a symbol of elsewhere—and control—that compounds the particularity of experience in the specific place. Crucially, it is coupled with the towers' other infamous function as home to a Police Station, with all the accruing symbolism in regard to the power of state surveillance, both historical and current.) Shane Phillips and Noel Collett stand at the head of a run-down residential street, suggesting a more immediate sense of domesticity and community. Finally Mathew Cook and Bonny Briggs stand immediately outside an individual Redfern dwelling/office.

The four photographs are not intended for presentation in any particular sequence, however as these descriptions suggest a movement into a specific Redfern environment does take place across the images. Redfern itself is located in relation to the larger city environment, and then increasingly pictured in terms of community and human inter-relation rather than cartographical identification. As with Lindt's photographs, the subjects of these images accrue signs of subjectivity and identity from these settings. But unlike Lindt's obviously constructed, artificial settings, Croft's environments are clearly the real environments in which her subjects live and/or work. The absolute centrality of land to Aboriginal, in particular tribal identity is stripped away in most nineteenth-century photographic images of Indigenous peoples in Australia. A different form of this relationship, drawing upon traditional rights and bonds to country but adapted to and developed within an urban environment is reasserted by Croft's images. Place *remains* crucial here. Moreover it's not solely a case of place contextualising/shaping the character of the subjects depicted within – even pictorially the relationship is more dynamic, even volatile. Place is equally determined by the subjects. So the images picture an enduring yet ever-changing relationship of belonging between the subjects and their environment. Many of these Indigenous subjects or their ancestors

may have transplanted from traditional tribal areas to the city. They may be challenged by aspects of urban change, or be distanced from the financial and political decision-making processes downtown that directly impact upon their immediate environment. Nevertheless the determined manner in which they stand their ground in the local parks, streets and before their homes leaves little doubt as to the intensity and significance of the bond they claim to this location. These four photographs are rejoinders of sorts to both those nineteenth-century images that attempt to dislocate subject from place, and thus strip away a core element of Aboriginal experience and identity, as well as to a Western preconception that such traditional relationships to land or place no longer apply within urban settings.

Of equal importance is the manner in which the images deal with the network of relationships between photographer, subject and viewer within photography. Croft's own writing is interesting here. In her 'Laying Ghosts to Rest' essay she ascribes resistance to or open defiance of the colonial viewer in the gaze of one of three figures in the earliest known photograph of Aborigines, a daguerreotype taken by Douglas T. Kilburn in Victoria in 1847. Significantly, Croft makes an explicit link across time in the response of Indigenous people to the photographic eye of the coloniser:

*This same gaze, the same stance, the same resistance is echoed in images of Indigenous people from every place and of every time. The collective pain, anger, resignation, tired patience, sense of loss and displacement is reflected in contemporary 'shots' of angry, urban Indigenous people and people of colour in their determination to keep on resisting.*<sup>11</sup>

Whilst the subjects in her own four *Conference Call* photographs adopt neutral, even inscrutable expressions these themselves can equally be interpreted as affirmations of both individual and collective identity, as well as undemonstrative modes of resistance to any sense of consumption by a colonising gaze. Indeed, Croft's figures do not simply resist the gaze of the Western viewer, they appropriate and return it in their apparently neutral, thus in the loaded language of colonial relations, 'objective' expression.

...

The question of how Indigenous photographers should represent their own communities from within using a medium traditionally associated with the outside objectification of their cultural identity has been debated widely over the past forty years. Within Indigenous communities, the development of documentary practices by Indigenous photographers was one important step, in obvious relation to the significant Indigenous Rights movement and activities of the 1970s and 1980s. Croft's *Conference Call* images, indeed much of her practice through the 1990s, evidences one particular response to this question, arrived at by both photographer and subjects. The images not only result from a form of accord between subjects and photographer, they actually picture the conditions of such an accord. They are photographs 'of' the individual as a social subject – as bound within sets of familial and cultural relationships, which are in turn grounded in place.

It is perhaps even possible to consider the work as a form of collective portrait, and at the same time, a form of self-portrait.

These final thoughts were amplified by viewing the four *Conference Call* photographs exhibited (again on the four walls of a darkened room within a room) in the *Half Light: Portraits from Black Australia* exhibition (2008-09) at the Art Gallery of New South Wales at the time of preparing this essay. This exhibition of photographic portraits of Indigenous subjects by Indigenous photographers functioned as a gathering of sorts (one in which Redfern featured strongly). And underpinning this gathering was an all-pervasive sense of this accord between photographers and subjects to work towards an assertive projection of both personal and public identity. Wandering through this gathering of subjects (both those behind and before the camera lens) it also struck me that much of the potency of Croft's work actually lies in its matter-of-fact quality. Friends, family and acquaintances simply stand before the camera on the streets and in the parks of Redfern – their place. As with the best of photography in general, ultimately once all the angles and trajectories have been pursued we are left with one lasting, enduring experience – that of the very basic assertion to presence of the photographic subject. These people were here, in this place, and their presence had real meaning. Photography is one means by which it will remain so.

Blair French is Executive Director of Artspace, Sydney. His books include *Out of Time: Essays Between Photography and Art* (Adelaide, 2006) and *Twelve Australian Photo Artists* (Sydney, 2008; with Daniel Palmer). Material for this essay is drawn from his unpublished PhD thesis, 'Picture This: The Photographic Image as Contemporary Art', University of Sydney, 2003. Copyright remains with the author.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Brenda L. Croft in conversation with Hetti Perkins, Sydney, April 2008, in Hetti Perkins and Jonathan Jones, eds, *Half Light: Portraits from Black Australia*, exhibition catalogue, Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2008, p. 57

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, *Neo-Avantgarde and Culture Industry: Essays on European and American Art from 1955 to 1975*, Cambridge Mass. and London: October, The MIT Press, 2000, pp xxi-xxii

<sup>3</sup> Fredric Jameson, 'Transformations of the Image in Postmodernity', in *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998*, London and New York: Verso, 1998, p. 135

<sup>4</sup> Author's notes, interview with Brenda L. Croft, Perth, 13 May 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Email to author, 24 January 2002.

<sup>6</sup> The full *Conference Call* collaboration was exhibited on one further occasion at Camerawork, London in 1994.

<sup>7</sup> As Croft notes, the late 1980s and early 1990s were when heroin was starting to have a real presence in Redfern. See Croft in conversation with Hetti Perkins, p. 57

<sup>8</sup> For example, the factory behind Sue Ingram has been replaced by apartment blocks, and the empty block of land in front of the 'TNT Towers'—themselves major Redfern 'icons'—has also been occupied in recent years by two new apartment blocks, indicating the move of an urban professional class into Redfern. (Indeed, with further massive re-development of Redfern a present priority at both local and state government level these images are likely to take on even greater significance as historical markers.)

<sup>9</sup> Writing on nineteenth-century colonial photographs of Indigenous subjects, and responding in particular to the lack of even the most basic information regarding their identity, Croft has written: 'Images like these have haunted me since I was a small child and, along with a desire to remap my father's familial history (and my own), were instrumental in guiding me to utilise the tools of photography in my own work.' Brenda L. Croft, 'Laying Ghosts to Rest', in Judy Annear ed., *Portraits of Oceania*, exhibition catalogue, Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1997, p. 9

<sup>10</sup> Croft, 'Laying Ghosts to Rest', p. 13

<sup>11</sup> Croft, 'Laying Ghosts to Rest', pp 13-14

# Conference Call

BRENDA L. CROFT

1992

**Sue Ingram,  
Botany Road/  
Regent Street,  
Redfern, from  
the series  
Conference Call  
(in collaboration  
with Adrian  
Piper) 1992.**







Matthew Cook  
and Bonny  
Briggs, Aboriginal  
Community Health  
Services, Pitt St,  
Redfern, detail  
from the series  
Conference Call (in  
collaboration with  
Adrian Piper) 1992.



Shane Phillips  
and Noel Collett,  
Eveleigh Street,  
Redfern, detail  
from the series  
Conference Call (in  
collaboration with  
Adrian Piper) 1992



*Gangway!*

*GANGWAY!*  
2009  
OIL ON CANVAS  
DANIEL BOYD



# Token Justice

SUMUGAN SIVANESAN

*The biggest thing that hit me was that it wasn't a riot, it was organised resistance. There was no looting, no disorganised chaos. It was all community getting together and holding down The Block and saying 'Enough's enough - we are sick of you police officers killing our young people.*

*- Choo Choo - MC with Redfern based hip hop outfit, Cuz Co, 24 November 2008*

**I**n February 2004, after spending some time abroad, I found a new home at the edge of Redfern. The day I moved, word spread that something big was going down in the iconic Aboriginal neighbourhood known as The Block. Later that evening, on my way home, I was stopped at a police barricade on Lawson Street. Redfern Station was also shut off. The air was electric and a small crowd had gathered, jostling for a glimpse of what was to come. That night I slept out on our balcony to the sound of helicopters as searchlights swept across the night sky.

Welcome to the neighbourhood.

On the morning of February 14, 2004 - St Valentine's Day - 17-year-old Thomas "TJ" Hickey<sup>1</sup> was fatally impaled on a fence behind Phillip Street in the adjacent suburb of Waterloo. Just before the incident, TJ was seen by neighbours riding his bicycle at high speed away from The Block. Two police vehicles were nearby. At the time, police were on patrol looking for a bag snatcher. It is likely that TJ, who was known to police as a "High Risk Offender", took fright and fled. Many in the community believe his death was the result of a police chase - by definition a "death in custody".

The mood the following day on The Block was tense, eventually boiling over into a night of unrest, commonly known as the "Redfern Riots". Images of Aboriginal youths clashing with riot police, upturned cars, fire engines and Redfern Railway Station in flames were beamed around the world.

Re-settling in Australia during these events sparked my interest in what I considered to be the fault lines of our contemporary culture. Since then, I have explored these issues through art, music, social intervention or whatever it is you do to understand something complicated. Late last year I realised 2009 would mark five years since TJ's death and felt the need to look more deeply into it.

I first came across local community leader, Ray Jackson, speaking at SquatSpace's *Tour of Beauty*.<sup>2</sup> In 1987 he was a founder of the (now defunct) Aboriginal Deaths in

Custody Watch, an Indigenous community organisation monitoring the treatment of Aboriginal people in custody. Ray is president of the Indigenous Social Justice Association.<sup>3</sup>

I visited Ray and interviewed him at his Waterloo home in October 2008. His modest housing commission unit (ironically located in the James Cook building) is stacked floor to ceiling with news clippings, books, articles, videotapes, etc - an extraordinary personal archive of Aboriginal campaign material.

According to Ray, it was the way the police handled community unrest following the death of TJ Hickey that directly precipitated the Redfern Riots.

"TJ was very well known to the youth, and kids were coming in from all over the place; Campbelltown and Mount Druitt, Marrickville...and The Block was filling up with youth. And what was also happening was that the police were also touring The Block. It shows their complete insensitivity."

"There was arguments that there had been a police chase, which had lead to the death of TJ the day before. The Block was seething with that thought, that the police had caused the death of TJ."

Posters appeared in the area showing members of the police force that read: *Wanted - Child Murderers. There is gang of child killers operating in the Redfern area. They can be easily identified, as they all dress the same. They are serial killers and will reoffend.*

Ray received reports of police activity on The Block when TJ's mother, Gail Hickey, sat grieving in the street.

"About three cars were driving around The Block, driving down Eveleigh Street, stopping opposite Gail and pointing, smirking, laughing - doing all these sorts of things. Then they'd drive on."

"Where the groups of kids were, they'd stop. They'd tell them 'You're next,' making the sign of a pistol. 'You're next' - and then they'd drive off."

(I recently confirmed these reports with Gail. She still feels herself and her family were targeted by the police both in Sydney and in Walgett, where they also spend much of their time.)<sup>4</sup>

"They were heating things up and they weren't stopped. I know complaints were made to Redfern [Police], but I know nothing happened. Nobody stopped them." explained Ray Jackson.

"And things just built up and up. There was another element there that had a few scores against the police and wanted to take the police on. They fuelled the kids up even further and it culminated in the Redfern Railway Station police annex being stoned - and that started it."

After a long history of antagonism, police and Aboriginal relations on The Block were, to say the least, strained. Ray, like many people in the community, suspect the authorities failed to contain the unrest in order to distract media attention from the death of TJ Hickey.

"When the fire was started in Redfern station, they

[Redfern police] ordered the fire brigade not to put it out. When cars were set alight, the fire brigade was ordered not to put it out, because it would look better for the TV.”

(I contacted NSW fire brigade to comment on this allegation and they denied this was the case.)<sup>5</sup>

“The kids started throwing things – there’d been projectiles gathered throughout the day. [But the police] could have dispersed those kids very easily ... [It] wasn’t a riot. There wouldn’t have been more than twenty kids throwing rocks at a time. There were more there, but it was only about twenty that were doing anything. There was some adults there as well, but mainly it was the youth.”

“When the police thought ‘now is the time to move’, they marched down, everybody dispersed. They stationed themselves in The Block until dawn, or something, and everybody went home. Y’know – [it] ended in a whimper.



Ray Jackson, photograph Zanny Begg

Very much. But it made the headlines and for weeks and weeks and weeks, you had these ridiculous reports coming out. Especially like the rags, like the *Daily Telegraph*, who beat dead dogs to death for Christ’s sake! It was ridiculous and the media – Channel Nine and Ten and all that. And they just come out with all this garbage...It was just a farce.”

At the time it was reported that up to fifty police were injured in the unrest, with an estimated one hundred people participating at its peak.<sup>6</sup> The police commander at the time, Bob Waites, was quoted saying he could not remember a riot “of this size”.<sup>7</sup>

“People forgot the reason why the unrest started. If the police had have stopped those cops from riding around The Block, if the police had taken a more sympathetic view to the events leading up to the unrest, it would have never had happened.”

Ray’s comments reflect attitudes widespread in the Aboriginal community that policing methods and the mainstream media harm the interests of Aboriginal people in an occupied land.

The inquest into the death of TJ Hickey began five months later in July 2004. For those hoping it would shed some light on the circumstances of his death, it proved especially frustrating.

In his report on the inquest, the then New South Wales Coroner, John Abernathy, exonerated the police, describing TJ’s death as a “freak accident”. While he found that a police vehicle did “follow” TJ Hickey, there was no evidence that he was being “pursued”.

Constable Michael Hollingsworth, a key witness to the incident, was the driver of the police vehicle found to be following TJ and the most senior of the four officers on the scene. He was excused from giving evidence at the inquiry,

on the grounds that it may expose him to disciplinary action.<sup>8</sup>

Hollingsworth’s partner, Constable Maree Reynolds, did testify. However, as noted in the Coroner’s report, she “was quite a poor witness with an extraordinary lack of memory of what I would have thought were significant events.”

The counsel assisting the coroner, Elizabeth Fullerton SC, was moved to comment: “For those of us who have heard police officers give evidence over many, many, many years, the claimed failure to recall is sometimes not in fact an honest answer.”<sup>9</sup>

The report also reveals that Constables Hollingsworth and Reynolds “discussed” the incident before filing their individual statements. These were then read by a superior, Sergeant Macintosh, and alterations suggested.

The Coroner chastised the Hickey family for not reporting any allegations of a chase to the appropriate police immediately (namely the very officers the family held responsible for the chase). The Coroner added, “Had that been done at the outset this matter would have followed a very different path.”

The Hickey family and their supporters are adamant justice was not served, and continue to call for the inquest to be re-opened.

As a result of the unrest the NSW government boosted Redfern police numbers and resources. They moved to new premises on Lawson Street, in the former TNT towers, from where, as rumour has it, surveillance cameras have for many years spied on The Block. The talk around Redfern is that the new police station also hosts a riot squad and a water cannon.



Sumugan Sivanesan collaborated with James Hancock for the work “*Troubled Justice*”. It was exhibited in the window of Grant Pirrie Gallery, Redfern in February 2009, to coincide with the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of TJ’s death. More information and interviews are accessible at: [www.thetroublewithtj.blogspot.com](http://www.thetroublewithtj.blogspot.com). Many thanks to Megan West for her legal advice and Brendan Phelan for his choice cuts.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> TJ Hickey’s father has asked that his son be known as Gamloria Doorroow while others in the community, including the people interviewed in this article, refer to him by the name TJ Hickey. For ease of understanding we will use TJ Hickey in this book, we hope with no disrespect to his father – editors’ note.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.squatspace.com/redfern/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.isja.org.au/>

<sup>4</sup> Telephone conversation with Gail Hickey, March 3 2009.

<sup>5</sup> “*New South Wales Fire Brigade firefighters were not instructed by the NSW Police to refrain from extinguishing the fire at Redfern Train Station in February 2004.*”

Tammy Ingold, Senior Public Affairs Officer, Public Affairs and Communications Strategy Unit, NSW Fire Brigades, March 2 2009

<sup>6</sup> “*Sydney riots over Aborigine death.*” BBC News, February 16 2004 <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/3491299.stm>>

<sup>7</sup> “*Fifty police injured in Redfern riot.*” ABC news online, February 15 2004

<<http://www.abc.net.au/news/australia/nsw/200402/s1045475.htm>>

<sup>8</sup> “*Inconsistencies in evidence on TJ Hickey’s death.*” The World Today, July 13 2004. Reporter: Michael Vincent.

<<http://www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2004/s1153143.htm>>

<sup>9</sup> “*Conflicting police reports emerge at Hickey inquest.*” 7.30 Report, ABC TV, July 15 2004. Reporter: Matt Peacock.

<<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2004/s1154980.htm>>



# PEMULWUY



## DREAM TEAM



VS

**TED**

**THE WRECKER**

**“Tonight in the heart of Redfern at Mundine’s Gym on The Block we have the long awaited fight between Ted, a 45 year old audio engineer from the Redfern Community Centre, and The Wrecker, Redfern’s controversial reigning middle weight champion... It’s a long awaited David and Goliath match up that is sure to get the locals revved up... Controversy has dogged The Wrecker since he won the championship in a fight so dirty it was called a set-up ... Ever since he has been knocking out people left, right and centre in a series of uneven match ups and dirty fights. While he certainly has the support from the big end of town it’s Ted, the underdog in this fight, who will have the local cheers...**

**If Ted wins tonight’s bout it will be a real Cinderella story. He has been working overtime to get ready for the fight of his life against an opponent who has greater muscle and power. Ted’s unique training strategy has focused on his connections to the local area, and when he gets going he sure has some real magic in the ring.”**

*Pemulwuy Dream Team* is a work inspired by the legend of Pemulwuy, who led an Indigenous resistance to the European settlement when the First Fleet arrived in 1788. It grew out animation workshops conducted with people who access the Redfern Community Centre - the participants were asked to help create Pemulwuy’s “Dream Team” who would continue the fight for justice, but in the contemporary context. The game is set in The Block at the famous Tony Mundine Gym, training centre for Super Middleweight Champion boxer, Anthony Mundine. You Are Here is joined by software developer, Andy Nicholson, to create a boxing game where each of the characters and their opponents fight out the future of Redfern. Viewers can chose to play a member of the *Pemulwuy Dream Team* and play a ritualized boxing match. Each game has an unpredictable outcome – you win some, you lose some – but what keeps the game going is the ongoing struggle for justice.

**\* DIRECT FROM REDFERN - THE BATTLE FOR THE BLOCK \***

YOU ARE HERE

# The difficult rebirth of Redfern

GEOFF TURNBULL

**R**edfern is famous. It is probably one of a few suburbs in Sydney, apart from Bondi, that is known around the world. Like the Bronx, Harlem or Soho it has an image and reputation that diverges from its emerging reality as government re-development of the land in the area changes the face of this inner city part of Sydney.

Redfern has been gentrifying for some time but not as fast as the rest of the inner city. Partly this is because of perceived high crime rates, partly because of its reputation as an Aboriginal area and partly because of the large concentration of public housing. Estate agents have been telling prospective home buyers in the area for years that this will be the next Paddington<sup>1</sup> (as soon as all the Aboriginal community is moved out).

The remaining inner city working class and migrant communities who were able to buy in the (then undesirable) inner city are also rapidly vanishing being replaced by people with high incomes able to pay expensive rents or service large mortgages. Student households find it increasingly difficult to band together and meet the area's rents. Government housing policy is increasingly looking at the need for affordable housing in the area to provide accommodation for key workers such as school teachers, nurses and police who can no longer afford to live here. This is a long way from the old working class "slums" of the inner city.

The most recent wave of changes in Redfern Waterloo started when the NSW Premier's Department put a "Place Management" program into the area after media stories about the stoning of buses by local youths. In response the Redfern Waterloo Partnership Project (RWPP) was established and in March 2002 the government announced a \$7 million package of initiatives to help address the area's problems. Interestingly one of the RWPP's main human services initiatives was to establish an interdisciplinary "Street Team" for

problem youth. The team was wound up in 2005 and the evaluation was so scathing that the government has declined to release the report despite Freedom of Information applications.

By the end of 2003 the RWPP had completed a study of the area's built environment named the RED Strategy. When its colour coded maps were exhibited it became obvious that the NSW Government owned about a third of Redfern/Waterloo and that they were considering the redevelopment of this land. These land holdings included now closed services like Redfern Primary School, Rachael Forster Hospital and Redfern Court House along with the old Redfern Police Station site, the former Eveleigh Railway Workshops and Australian Technology Park.

At its last meeting with the community in December 2003, the RWPP assured the community there would be plenty of opportunity for input into the preliminary RED Strategy and that consultation would be done through South Sydney Council. The future of human services would be dealt with following a review in 2004 which in turn also recommended a consultative approach between government and non government service providers.

2004, however, saw some major changes. Firstly, following a dispute over some investment properties South Sydney Council was amalgamated with City of Sydney Council. Local independent state MP Clover Moore decided to stand for and subsequently won the mayoral election and her ticket won effective control of Council rather than the expected ALP win.

Secondly in February 2004 after the death of a local Aboriginal youth Redfern erupted onto TV screens around the world as police and Aboriginal youths battled one another in front of Redfern railway station. This sparked a NSW upper house Inquiry into Redfern Waterloo including into the RWPP and its actions. Among the findings of the Inquiry was criticism of the RWPP's lack of community engagement especially with the Aboriginal community and it recommended the need for an improved partnership.

In October and November 2004 the government announced its response to the work done by the RWPP and the Inquiry. Instead of implementing urban renewal through the earlier proposed transparent processes of the local (now City of Sydney) Council, they established the Redfern Waterloo Authority (RWA). They also created a new Minister for Redfern/Waterloo to oversee the redevelopment of the area and to have responsibility for all government activity in the area: Frank Sartor.

The first indication of what might be ahead came with the leaking of draft cabinet documents to the *Sydney Morning Herald* on November 29, 2004 under the heading "Revealed: how Redfern will be reborn". The documents revealed quite concrete plans for the area in contrast to the general media statements released about the establishment of the RWA. In effect the plan was to double the area's population, while maintaining the same number of public tenants in the area. The effect would be to dilute the influence of public housing. It was also proposed that the urban renewal be funded through the sale of government land.

The leaked documents included government plans for Aboriginal housing on the Aboriginal Housing Company (AHC) owned land adjacent to Redfern station known as The Block. It soon became evident, following the AHC's refusal to give the NSW government control of their proposed housing scheme, The Pemulwuy Project, that they would do everything to block it.

In the four years following the cabinet decision the Minister for Redfern/Waterloo and the RWA have tried almost everything to stymie The Pemulwuy Project, including reducing the amount of residential development that can be built on the part of land owned by the Aboriginal Housing Company. This land was specifically bought to provide Aboriginal Housing. At the same time, on surrounding government owned land, the government introduced planning controls that allowed a significant increase in both commercial and residential densities.

Furthermore, without any planning for the future needs of a community of double the size, the RWA proceeded to sell the former school site and hospital. When asked what would happen if the expanded community needed a new school in 20 years, the RWA told residents that the government would have to go out and buy the land for it. When asked why the hospital could not be converted into much needed supported accommodation, the community was told it was unsuitable because it was two storeys!

On North Eveleigh the government had earlier decided to invest \$40m in the development of a contemporary performing and visual arts space in the old Carriage Works building. It opened at the beginning of 2007. The rest of the site passed to the RWA which has re-zoned it ready to sell for commercial and residential development. The economic crisis, and an interest from Sydney University, may yet see the North Eveleigh site become an extension of Sydney University campus rather than the commercial and housing developments the RWA wanted (to extract the best price for the site).

Apart from Redfern Station, the last element of the RWA's plans for rebuilding the area is the Built Environment Plan Phase Two for the redevelopment of the public housing lands in Redfern Waterloo. The general parameters for this plan are aimed at increasing population density to dilute the proportion of public housing residents.

The formulation and implementation of the RWA plans have been done behind closed doors and have been characterised by little collaboration with the local residents or non-government agencies. Plans have been exhibited and then finalised by the RWA often with few changes. A combination of a "Government knows best" attitude and a funding model based on selling scarce inner city public land has defined the redevelopment approach in Redfern.

In late 2008 a new Minister Kristina Keneally took over as Minister for Redfern/Waterloo. Under the Act governing the RWA the minister has immense power to decide what happens in the area. At a meeting in March 2009 with community group REDWatch a more consultative approach has been proposed by the Minister and time will tell if some of the community's aspirations are also incorporated into the RWA plans before the RWA finishes its work in 2011-12.

This will of course not undo the changes that have come about as a result of the government's intervention but it may help to lessen the impact on those who already live here. It might also contribute to a new Redfern identity in which people find Aboriginal arts, businesses and culture a key part of the area rather than problems such as social isolation and civil unrest by disaffected youth.

Throughout this process the Redfern Eveleigh Darlington Waterloo Watch group (REDWatch) have monitored the government intervention and tried to get greater community involvement in the process. REDWatch's website ([www.redwatch.org.au](http://www.redwatch.org.au)) documents community concerns in Redfern/Waterloo. Through the Redfern/Waterloo Issue Updates, also available on the REDWatch website, you can see how the issues and struggles of Redfern/Waterloo unfolded week by week and month by month over the last few years.



Geoff Turnbull has a BA (Hons1) from UNSW and is the Spokesperson for REDWatch. Since the inception of the RWA Geoff has been on the RWA Built Environment Ministerial Advisory Committee (a committee that has never met with the Minister) and he is a member of the Aboriginal Housing Company's Pemulwuy Project Team. With his wife Lyn, Geoff produces the Redfern Waterloo Issues Updates which appear on the REDWatch website.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> A once working class suburb which is now a very wealthy shopping and residential area.



# Redfern/Waterloo *Tour of Beauty*

SQUATSPACE

BOTTOM LEFT PHOTO: ALI BLOGG

# Complexity, Aesthetics and Gentrification: Redfern/Waterloo Tour of Beauty.

LUCAS IHLEIN

**I**t's now nearly 4 years since SquatSpace began running its *Tour of Beauty* through Redfern/Waterloo. Being involved with this project as one of the *Tour's* organisers has been a formative and grounding first-hand experience in spatial politics, gentrification, urban planning and design. I want to take this opportunity to briefly reflect on the neighbourhood complexity which the *Tour* makes visible (if not entirely comprehensible) as it relates to two key issues in the ecology of neighbourhoods: gentrification and aesthetics.

The *Tour of Beauty* began as a strategy for coming to grips with the complexity of Redfern. In Sydney, the word "Redfern" comes packaged with all sorts of (often unspoken) associations: *pride*: for the Aboriginal folks from near and far, for whom Redfern is a physical and spiritual foothold in an increasingly hostile urban environment; *fear*: for a huge slab of the non-Indigenous population who steer clear of the place as a general rule; *hope*: for the property developers whose watchful eye is cast on Redfern's precarious social and architectural structures; and *endless frustration*: for politicians of all persuasions, who have continually failed, in their own terms, to "solve the Redfern Problem" - which presents an

entanglement of racial politics, welfare policy, and land value. It is precisely Redfern's resistance to problem definition which makes it so complex.

*A problem? For whom? A solution? On whose terms?* Redfern is not a chess game. Chess, though offering an enormous array of potential moves and counter-moves, always moves forward towards a known and desired goal. Thus the term "wicked problem", coined in 1973 by design theorists Horst Rittel and Melvin Webber, seems appropriate for Redfern. A wicked problem has no clear definition. It has no clear "rules" of engagement. There is no way of knowing when a wicked problem has been solved, or when one should stop trying to solve it. It is impossible to simply impose a solution which functions well in analogous situations, and any attempt at a solution tends to generate a proliferating cascade of further problems, each of which may be equally difficult to define and solve.<sup>1</sup>

In mid 2005, when SquatSpace naively stepped into the Redfern fray, we were presented with a problem of our own. As artists, we are used to making Art. Art tends to select, define, frame, solidify and simplify elements from the world, and transplant them into another context. It is a process of representation in



Tony Mundine's Gym on The Block, April 2009.



Terraces on The Block, April 2009.



which one thing comes to stand for another, resulting in a (provisionally) satisfying coherence and sense of unity. Choosing to “make art about Redfern” is thus a tricky proposition. How could we reconcile the tension between the complexity of our subject-territory, with art’s requirement of coherence? Our tentative experiment at moderating this tension was the *Tour of Beauty*, which provides an experiential framework for dialogue and dissent without requiring closure and consensus.

The *Tour* works well at providing “a foot in the door” to Redfern’s local politics. Our role as tour-guides steers clear of party lines. We are not beholden to the correctness of council or state government policy, nor are we hamstrung by the orthodoxy of hard-core oppositional local action groups. We run the tours as “fellow citizens”, although by now, most of the members of SquatSpace have been forced out of the neighbourhood by rising property prices. Speakers on the tour represent themselves: they are free to be as inflammatory, seductive or rhetorical as they like. Our intention, with this way of making art, was to liberate ourselves from the onerous role of having to represent the opinions and arguments of others, which, we believed, would always be diluted and misconstrued when filtered through our secondary voices.

Thus, the *Tour* offers a series of sharp, angry, sweet or sad speeches. Ray Jackson walks us through the final path taken by TJ Hickey before he died after pursuit by the police. Ray’s passionate plea to re-open the inquest is delivered in front of the very fence upon which the young man was impaled, forcing us into the uneasy role of impromptu mourners and amateur crime-scene investigators. Lyn Turnbull welcomes us into The Settlement, a dishevelled neighbourhood community centre. She recounts the tale of a hostile takeover bid by certain local residents, keen to rid the street of the Aboriginal kids whose exuberant and mischievous presence was bringing down property prices. And Ross Smith gently shows us the public housing which defines a large proportion of the area, whose population, he says, “are one of the most studied” in Australia. “Poked and prodded by experts who come and go and never come back”, Ross says the public housing tenants carry on bemused, determined not to be intimidated by the academic glare of anthropological and architectural research.

These are just a few of the regular speakers on the *Tour*. Experientially, the *Tour* is a strange day out. It is exhausting, both emotionally and physically - it runs for over 4 hours. And we who come along - how should we define ourselves? *Tourists?* - if so, what kind of tourists are we? We take a risk, leaving our homes and traipsing *en masse* around a contested suburb like Redfern (even if many of us already live here). It is unsettling: a group in a bus, or on bikes, moving through public space becomes spectacle as much as spectator. Inevitably, something unplanned will happen on the *Tour*. Recently, an inebriated inhabitant of Redfern Park saw our gathering as a readymade audience - an opportunity to hold forth on some incomprehensible subject of his own. How do tourists respond to such a situation? This encounter foregrounds the paradox inherent in the *Tour* itself. “If you came out today to experience the real Redfern, well, here it is

folks!” Unlike our pre-booked speakers, who while provocative and passionate, are for the most part encouraging of polite dialogical exchange, these random incursions have no predictable behavioural script. Which brave soul will intervene to expel or include this homeless man, so we might continue with our discussion about Redfern?

Such situations bring to the surface the ethics of everyday action - the complexity inherent in the seemingly innocent question of “what to do about Redfern”? There is never any end to this complexity: and precious little in the way of a vocabulary to even speak of it. Yet speak we must, and the *Tour*’s dialogical structure provides a small framework in which difficult questions can be raised and discussed.

## Artists are thus the avant-garde of gentrification

The final stop on the *Tour of Beauty* is a place at the eastern edge of Redfern, called Crystal Waters. It is a modern high-rise apartment development on the site of a former glass-works factory. After a day of visiting Aboriginal housing sites, community centres, abandoned government buildings and housing tower-blocks, Crystal Waters is a jarring vision. Our visit is like a trip into the future - or at least, one possible future - in which Redfern’s complex spatial and social tensions have, perhaps, been erased, replaced with a lego-land environment complete with foaming fountains and private security patrols. At this place, unlike all the former sites, we offer no guest speaker. As tourists, we now *confront ourselves*: the group organically reforms into a circle, and begins to sift through some of the overwhelming complexity of urban design and planning which we have confronted.

Haunting our discussions around the fountain at Crystal Waters is *aesthetics*. The very *look* of the place raises the question of taste. Clean and new, in contrast to the layered accretions of grime and history which characterise most of the other sites on the *Tour*, Crystal Waters is generally held by the group to be a sanitised and “artificial” (and therefore failed) attempt at neighbourhood creation. In this, aesthetics and politics are inextricably interwoven. “I wouldn’t want to live here”, one of our tourists mutters. But for others on the *Tour*, Crystal Waters points a possible way forward: centrally designed apartment complexes are an opportunity to share amenities, services, water and power. They might even allow for community gardens and large-scale solar power generation. The “characterful” but ecologically wasteful terrace houses of Redfern struggle to achieve such design intelligence, embedded as they are in nineteenth century British architectural principles. Another tourist counters that it is unlikely that Crystal Waters has

REDFERN SOUTH SYDNEY

FUCK  
THE  
POLICE

MY  
BLOCK



WELCOME TO THE  
BLOCK



APES  
MADE  
BY

SHITTY  
LOVE

FUCK  
YOU

E-STREET

SIOME

WORLD

FUCK

PA

UNN

JAM

2002

MADE  
BY

utilised anything but the cheapest and meanest of technologies and materials - it is space parcelled, commodified and alienated at its worst. He casts aspersions on the kind of non-community that such a place is likely to engender: *yuppies*, driving their cars directly into the underground car-park, taking the lift to their apartments, walking their fluffy dogs in the manicured private park, and never otherwise interacting with the rest of Redfern. He means, without interacting with the *real* Redfern.

“If you came out today to experience the real Redfern, well, here it is folks!”

The fact that the discussion reaches this point - that we allow ourselves to make sweeping generalisations about the aesthetics and lifestyle habits of a large segment of the population - is disquieting. After a day of opening our ears to a broad range of voices - believing, that is, in our own open-mindedness - here we are again, struggling to come to terms with difference. While no doubt an understandable response to our sense of helplessness in halting the march of “progress”, the ease with which we can engage in yuppie-bashing reveals a blind spot in our thinking. That blind spot is *our own role in the process of gentrification*.

When we artists and creative types move into a neighbourhood, it is nearly always because of its affordability. Run-down spaces offer an opportunity to artists not visible to other sectors of the property market. We are able to invest energy into architectural waste structures, creating a connection between beauty and utility where there previously seemed to be none. In fact, it is this “authentic” utilitarian beauty of artists’ warehouses, lofts and squats (and which we find lacking in faked-up developments like Crystal Waters) which allows the broader property market to wake up to their potential for intensified commodification.

Artists are thus the avant-garde of gentrification - a fact we never acknowledge when we moan about the “yuppies moving in and changing the face of our suburb”. We loudly declare our abhorrence for gentrification, yet we ourselves are a key step in its onward march. As David Ley has so incisively pointed out, this is how aesthetics is embedded in the property market. Artists (somewhat like real-estate agents) engage in a quasi-magical process of value-creation. We devote attention to worthless

and invisible phenomena. Like renovators and do-ers-uppers, the attention of artists makes junk special and *valuable*. It is therefore no surprise that the same occurs to the very neighbourhoods which we inhabit. As Ley writes, gentrification instigated by artists involves the exact same trajectory as the classic Duchampian transformation of garbage into found objects: ‘the movement of [...] a place, from junk to art and then on to commodity.’<sup>2</sup> The final step, then, in the gentrification process is the pushing of those same artists out of their homes, which are now too expensive, and onto the next low-rent neighbourhood. And so the cycle continues.

The *Tour of Beauty* is no doubt playing its own small part in this process. However, it could do more. It could, precisely, begin to cast the spotlight right back onto artists’ spatial transformations of Redfern. In this way, we might begin to see ourselves as intrinsically involved in, rather than victims of, the gentrifying forces of change. In addition, perhaps we could begin to invite those very yuppies we seem to abhor as guest speakers on the *Tour*. The danger, of course, is that we may be criticised for giving airtime to those who certainly don’t need it, whose “money talks” much more loudly than the clamoring voices of Redfern’s battlers. What’s more, by listening to them, we might dull our oppositional edge, the sharp clear moral high-ground that a partial understanding of any situation enables. But apart from our egotistical (and wrongheaded) attachment to being the noble underdogs of gentrification, there is not much more to lose. To gain? Plenty. A chance to understand yet another aspect of the ever-evolving multifaceted social and spatial equilibrium which is a neighbourhood. The possibility, that is, of moving forward into an ever more complex ecology, which, this time, might be conceived in a more holistic manner.



Lucas Ihlein is a member of SquatSpace.  
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#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>The term “wicked problem” was introduced to us by Redfern resident Jack Barton, an architect and urban researcher. According to Barton, his PhD thesis - centred on spatial decision support systems for suburb planning - would never have been completed if he had continued to use Redfern as his case study: the area was too complex and its problem-set too vast to be tamed by the requirements of the academic system.

<sup>2</sup>Ley, D., 2003, “Artists, Aestheticisation and the Field of Gentrification”, *Urban Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 12, p. 2528.

# When Wabi met Sabi

ELIZABETH FARRELLY

**T**here is a kind of reverse-entropy in the textural life of cities today, a relentless drift from authentic to synthetic, from down and dirty to schmick and span, from wholegrain to lipgloss. Paris to Singapore, Kings Cross to Green Square. From *wabi sabi* to lifestyle.

*Wabi sabi*? Sounds like some icy-looking green paste that shoots fire from your nostrils during sushi, right? In fact, it's a concept from 16<sup>th</sup> century Japanese aesthetics, peripherally associated with Zen Buddhism, which celebrates the humble, the worn, the ambiguous, the shadowy and the derelict. Some say it's the next big thing in western misappropriation of eastern ideas, after *feng shui* that is. In the world of tourism, *wabi sabi* translates into something like "authenticity" or "local colour". How ironic, then, that we traverse the globe in search of local colour but when it comes to our own, our kneejerk reaction is to call in the bulldozers.

Nothing new in a bulldozer mentality of course. The 60s attack on Woolloomooloo was driven by the same mixed motives – expand the Central Business District, maximize yield and 'clean-up' (the houses of) the poor. That plan, like the Redfern/Waterloo proposal, would have doubled resident numbers and added 35,000 office spaces for workers.

It didn't happen, but that's not the point. The question is why we persist in this city-cleansing thing. It is as if there's a refresh button somewhere to make the city all innocent again. As if, in reborn houses with new-paved streets, people will drop all those icky habits and behave clean: Like nice folks.

Woolloomooloo might have escaped sanitizing, by the skin of its teeth, but we've done King's Cross and next in the cleansing line is Redfern. It's

understandable. Look at the lingo: once sore-talk moves in – once we habitually hear "running sore" for The Block and "eyesore" for Waterloo - we know demolition will soon seem the only solution.

Slum-clearance is the proper name for this demolition-reflex, and now, quite as much as a century ago, it flags a deep mistake. As City Historian Dr Shirley Fitzgerald, puts it, "the idea that poor environments generated poverty, immorality and human misery justified the removal of housing which offended bourgeois notions of what a prosperous city should look like ...[ignoring the fact] that poverty was endemic, and that demolishing substandard housing in one place would only encourage its emergence somewhere else."

This is axiomatic. The surprise is that we still need to say it. All together now, after me: *you don't solve social problems with bulldozers.*

But surely, you argue, something needs to be done? Surely we can't just let the drug-taking and the violence continue unchecked? Surely, with things this desperate, this ugly, police powers are necessary? Surely market forces offer the best hose-pressure? Surely whatever-it-takes is what it takes?

Well yes, and no. A number of confusions are operating here – conflating ethics and aesthetics, cause and effect.

You don't stop people peddling drugs, getting drunk or being violent by giving them nice houses to do it in. Redfern's terraces are no different, physically (excepting a little dereliction) from those of the leafy streets of Paddington. Waterloo's housing commission towers are hardly distinguishable from the developments of Green Square, now that architecture's gone so retro.

*Wabi sabi* is dangerous, of course. Sen no Rikyu, the subversive tea-master who took the idea to its 16th century apotheosis was forced, like Socrates, into ritual suicide at age seventy. No less now. To modernism's slick, synthetic monotheism *wabi sabi* opposes the unpretentious, the overlooked, the contradictory.

No, the difference between Redfern and cleansville is not hardware but wetware. Same old stuff – education, wealth, access. We *want* elegant environments to generate elegant behaviour, just like we want the beautiful princess to be good, and the ugly sisters bad. But the evidence is not with us. The causality is, if anything, the other way around. Social problems have social causes; it's the behaviour that generates the slum.

But cities, like onions, have layers. And underlying all this hoo-ha is a classic big-city dynamic; small knot of intractable social difficulty (aka the urban poor) in direct path of great globalizing juggernaut (aka city of mammon). The city must expand, since that is what cities, like economies, do.

The government – any government – has two choices. Let rip or get creative, subtle even, in defence of all the small, endangered, *wabi-sabi* uses that enrich city centres the world over but

cannot, ever, defend themselves against the roaring, tearing land-value impact of heritage-free high-rise zoning. The Redfern/Waterloo Authority is the first masquerading as the second. Let-rip dressed as sensitive social engineering.

The irony is of course that the let-rip option doesn't actually require government – except Thomas Paine's "best government ...which governs least". Indeed, the only good reason to involve government in city-making at all is to protect the *wabi sabi* from the juggernaut. Otherwise, you just change the zoning and stand clear.

So, what will happen? Under current proposals, Redfern/Waterloo will be the next Green Square, only higher, smoother, shinier. Why? The new Redfern/Waterloo Authority must over-develop in order to fund itself, but tower buildings are like eucalypts; impressive in themselves but death to all other species.

Yes yes. The public housing will be apologetically forced out to the suburbs. Ditto heritage, leaving only a plaque or two to mark its passing. And with it all will go some of the city's last pockets of *wabi sabi*, plus the eccentrics, creatives and dysfunctionals that shelter in its folds.

*Wabi sabi* is dangerous, of course. Sen no Rikyu, the subversive tea-master who took the idea to its 16<sup>th</sup> century apotheosis was forced, like Socrates, into ritual suicide at age seventy. No less now. To modernism's slick, synthetic monotheism *wabi sabi* opposes the unpretentious, the overlooked, the contradictory. To modernism's unwavering forward faith, *wabi sabi* answers, all progress is illusory. Subversive? Sure. Then again maybe, at a moment when everything we add seems to diminish rather than enhance Sydney's inherent beauty, it's time to wonder whether development is the only possible tune. Time to nurture *wabi sabi*, in the very tyre tracks of mammon.

Elizabeth Farrelly is a Sydney-based columnist and author who holds a PhD in architecture and a number of writing awards. Her latest book is *Blubberland: the dangers of happiness* (UNSW Press, 2007). This article was first published in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, edited and reprinted with permission of the author.



RIP  
T-JAN  
2004

CHUNKY

# Chapter 2:

## *Fine Art of Gentrification*

*The question of what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from that of what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire. The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanisation. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.*

David Harvey, *The Right to the City*

# Art, Urbanism, Cultural Critique: Lefebvrian Shades

ANN DESLANDES

**L**et us begin with the “critical friendship” that existed between the Marxist sociologist Henri Lefebvre and Situationist artists such as Guy DeBord and Raoul Vaneigem. These quarrelsome allies shared a “fascination and critique of the colonisation and fragmentation of everyday life” in the Western European city of the 1960s. Their works demonstrated the ways in which urban space is suffused with the demands and desires of economy and empire, and – taken with the earlier *flâneur* of Walter Benjamin and the foundational spatial sociology of Georg Simmel – they re-member us to the segregation, alienation and persistent promise of play that is bound up in the city as we know it. This is a space forged by industry, accumulation and what Gayatri Spivak, theorist of post-coloniality and economic migration, refers to as “hopes for justice under capitalism”. Indeed, Australian urbanist Leonie Sandercock conceptualises contemporary city planning as “the organisation of hope”.

These theoretical nodes deliver the notion of “the urban” as a moment and a form of sociability. In

Lefebvrian and Situationist time, urbanisation is a social phenomenon, a practice that moves through social relationships; a process more than an agenda. Urban experience cannot be overlaid upon the time-space grid of western rationality without there being productions of its own – wrinkles in time, time out of joint, hauntings, shadows, skeletons and other non-linear ephemera. It was the compression and metering of time and space that Lefebvre saw as an imperative for urban planning to undo: “The masses”, he noted, are temporally controlled through “carefully measured space”; “time eludes them”.

It is this troubled relationship of space to time that aesthetic practices can reveal, query and subvert – aesthetics is not chronological, though it may be chronic. We arrive, in this way, at Lefebvre’s right to the city: echoed in the contemporary work of David Harvey and Mike Davis, among others. If we are all to live in the city then it must be a space where we can all live. “The right to the city”, Lefebvre declares “cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life” – direct democracy, civil society, games,



fairs, art, philosophy – “a civil society based not on an abstraction but on space and time as they are lived.” The force of his ideas as a political platform in his own city may be felt in a slogan of the 1970s Parisian Left: “*changer la ville, changer la vie – change the city, change life*”.

This utopian aspect of urbanism as led by Lefebvre is important in projecting its relationship to art/ists and cultural critique. Both require a capacity to imagine and perform difference (for Lefebvre it was “living differentially” ), transformation and futurity; to incarnate non-linear time. It is in this vein that we may consider Lefebvre’s regular meditations upon thinking the city as a sociable phenomenon. The city – comprised of the local and the global, the ‘near’ and ‘far’ – is “a text in a context so vast and ungraspable as such except by reflection”. This reflection is the work of artists – and it is not a matter of mere illustration; the artist mediates the city, hers is an act of interpretation, a negotiation of space. It is at this point that urbanism meets art-as-cultural-critique, where there becomes “a distinction between the city, a present and immediate reality, a practico-material and architectural fact, and the urban, a social reality made up of relations which are to be conceived of, constructed or reconstructed by thought”. Culture is produced in the space between the two – and they must be thought together if this production is to be critical: “urban life, urban society, in a word, the urban, cannot go without a practico-material base, a morphology”. Lefebvre pushes the artist-as-mediator to act upon the city, to see it as socially and physically constructed. There is an important difference between this artistic practice of aesthesis over one of cognitive synthesis: the synthesis that is attempted by analytical thought “hides what it conceals: strategies” – strategies of social stratification which are reflected so starkly in most modern cities and all too often represented as a dimorph of slum dwellers and gentry. Certain aesthetic practices, as praxis, may yet reveal these strategies through “the gathering together of what gives itself as dispersed, dissociated, separated, and this in the form of simultaneity and encounters”.

Scott Lash and John Urry, contemporary interlocutors of Lefebvre, think of the process at play here as “aesthetic reflexivity”: the negotiation of symbol and allegory, a process privileged over public sphere politicking. In this way the sensibilities of art suggest other ways of knowing the city: “experiential, intuitive, local knowledges; knowledges based on practices of talking, listening, seeing, contemplating, sharing; knowledges expressed in visual and other symbolic, ritual, and artistic ways rather than in quantitative or analytical modes based on technical jargons that by definition exclude those without professional training”, as Sanderecock puts it.

Contemporarily, artist-urbanists engage this sensibility and mount cultural critiques through mapping, archiving, public performance and other such vehicles for critical exchange, encounter and engagement with urban policy and spatial politics. These projects demonstrate urban theories and cultural productions that live for and respond to local futures. They particularise the globally

It is this troubled relationship of space to time that aesthetic practices can reveal, query and subvert – aesthetics is not chronological, though it may be chronic. We arrive, in this way, at Lefebvre’s right to the city: echoed in the contemporary work of David Harvey and Mike Davis, among others. If we are all to live in the city then it must be a space where we can all live. “The right to the city”, Lefebvre declares “cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life” – direct democracy, civil society, games, fairs, art, philosophy – “a civil society based not on an abstraction but on space and time as they are lived.”

promulgated and abstracted phenomena of urbanisation, slumification and gentrification.

To be sure, if Lefebvre believed in the capacity of art to positively transform socio-spatial relations in the city, he also hinted at the equal possibility of its complicity in spatial repression and the way in which this occurs through rhetorics of democracy, urban renewal and/or the proliferation of “culture”. Art is not separate to society, it has a political economy and it can be used for both progressive and reactionary ends. It delivers a cultural dividend in the gentrification of suburbia and the fetishisation of slums. Spaces for living and art making are secured through the social and cultural capital that art and artists purportedly bring. The urban may generate spaces of encounter and exchange that take place outside of the relations of production but are simultaneously fully present within their own conditions of production.

Within this, ghettoisation and segregation may be just as imposing upon the rich as on the poor, as foreshadowed above. In Lefebvre’s words:

*Here are ‘social housing estates’ without teenagers or old people.... Here are private housing developments which form a microcosm and yet remain urban because they depend on centres of decision-making and each house has a television. Here is a daily life well divided into fragments: work, transport, private life, leisure....*

Of course, the difference “here” is that those more empowered by (capitalist, liberal) democracy may control this process. North American urbanist Bryan Finoki documents “the upper class’ exploitation of a culture of fear to justify urbanizing spaces of exclusion and enclosure”, such as “gated communities, closed condominiums, secured shopping malls, restricted office space, neighbourhood checkpoints, private security outposts, etc.” That this has been able to occur through the postures of democratisation – i.e. rhetorics of choice, aspiration and achievability – demands a recognition by the critic of how “the urban and political form is inextricably linked, and the ways the built environment serves as an arena for political contest and democracy’s reproduction of social inequality.” Finoki is talking here about megalopolises such as São Paulo, Madrid and Los Angeles where socio-economic segregation is distributed in such a way as to create an “urban blotter” of material division throughout, as opposed to previous markings of a rich centre and a poor periphery.

Assuredly, spatial politics in Australia are “always already” unsettled by the (post)colonial condition, over and above extant measures of wealth and poverty. Our original urbanism is a violent one: the taking of the land by force; the invaders crafting it in their own image or to their own ends. This legacy peaks at regular points on Australia’s urban topography: the contest over Aboriginal community housing in Redfern and anxieties about Native Title law in the suburbs riff off projections of rack and ruin in Northern Territory towns. This is the foundational

mode by which Australian spaces labour difference, and thereby also memory, trauma, forgiveness, fear and hope. Urbanism, art practice, architecture and town planning are positioned to reveal, assist and/or erase this labour.

To zero in on Sydney: here is a space where the colonial reflexes of shoring up borders and quelling settler anxiety are echoed in the willingness of government and planning professionals to capitulate to the distant demands of finance capital – a phenomenon described by Sandercock as “urban political regimes rushing to embrace the global investors, terrified that their city/region will drop off all the relevant maps”. The contest over spaces for living – for staying alive, for conviviality – is fierce, and may be implicated in an urbanism that is intersected by the practice of art-as-cultural-critique.

Sandercock poses “five qualities or sensibilities of a 21st century urban imagination: political, therapeutic, audacious, creative and critical”. These sensibilities animate “a construction site of the mind and heart” when engaged in urban planning. And, in a process reflecting Lefebvrian/Situationist currents, they are already at work in the contemporary ‘global’ city, in “the resurgence of indigenous peoples and an associated politics of reclaiming their land...; the rise of organized civil society and the new politics of social movements”. Lefebvre’s “differentialism” foreshadows Sandercock’s “cultural politics of difference”, which has provided a regular and fundamental challenge to the homogenising market determinism of our latter-day living spaces. This is all moment(a) of “the attempt to create the space, in one place, at one point in time, where perceptions might shift, where public learning might occur, and some larger transformation take place”, “where the ‘previously unthinkable’ shifts into possibility”. Here, art-as-cultural-critique has vibrant, complicit, processual, political meaning for the development of urban space. As Lefebvre thought it should.



By Ann Deslandes: a writer who lives, unsurprisingly, in the inner western suburbs of Sydney.

# Mega-gentrification

BRIAN HOLMES

*The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city.*

– David Harvey

**W**hat is the city for? The response of neoliberal urbanism has been extraordinarily coherent: the city is a living and breathing machine for maximizing the return on investment. The frenetic gentrification of attractive city neighborhoods over the course of the last decade and the dramatically swelling real-estate bubbles that came in its wake have provided the most obvious illustration of this primary rule. Behind the urban scenes, the transnationalization of municipal bond offers has been widely used to raise capital for the infrastructure of the real-estate boom, opening up lucrative financial markets and reconfiguring the links between municipal and national governance in the process. These two major trends have both been subordinate to a

third phenomenon, the grand prize of neoliberal urbanism: the installation of postmodern production facilities, whether the big league of global corporate headquarters and associated services, or the smaller but still highly profitable gemstones of credit-based luxury consumption (shopping centers, tourist districts, franchised boutiques). In a breathtaking press toward total makeover, the face of cities across the world has been changed since the early 1980s, not only to fit an aesthetic norm, as is widely conjectured, but above all in accordance with an underlying toolkit, a unified set of productive and regulatory procedures. The result of the three interrelated transformations can be termed megagentrification: an entirely new, globally connected urban realm responding to the needs and desires of increasingly homogeneous world elites.

This pattern is increasingly well known, and I will sketch out its features in more concrete detail below. What has not yet been formulated is the question that appears on the horizon of the current credit crisis and the prolonged recession or depression

that is almost sure to follow. Yet this question is the only thing that really matters today, it is the crux of our present moment. Is neoliberal urbanism a destiny? Or can a combination of local inhabitants' movements, national regulation and a broad transnational analysis of prevailing trends act together to counter the most damaging processes that are currently at work? While entire sectors of the corporate elites slide into bankruptcy and the state comes back in with a vengeance, can contesting social forces reclaim a right to the city?

Such sweeping questions were not on anyone's agenda back in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the word gentrification first came to designate the home-improvement efforts of a few hip entrepreneurs who could be alternatively mocked or flattered by connotations of finer lifestyles and a vague aura of "Merry Olde England." But the neoliberal version of urban renewal no longer matches that quaint image of forty years ago. With his analysis of three distinct phases in the gentrification process, the geographer Neil Smith has clearly demonstrated the successive increases in scale, to the point where today, in the phase of "generalized gentrification," the installation of major cultural facilities designed as investment magnets is carried out under integrated municipal and state-government plans for the valorization of urban property on world markets.<sup>1</sup> Commercial investment in such "regenerated" zones is inevitably dominated by transnational franchises with the ability to raise initial capital, apply pre-cut management schemes, provide flawless logistical support and unveil instantly recognizable brand-name decors. In European cities formerly marked by a specific national or regional character, the appearance of fully standardized consumption environments in the 1990s came as something of a shock, underscoring the new status of real-estate speculation as a prime terrain of both private and public finance. Elsewhere, however, the very word gentrification seems to collapse beneath the magnitude of urban renewal programs: in countries like China, for example, what is typically at stake is not the beautification of existing streets, parks and housing stock, but instead, the razing of entire districts and the construction of high-rise, high-rent towers in their place. Yet the old notion of an aristocratic "landed gentry" living off the rent of rural property has gained new currency in all these different cases, as lucky owners around the world have been able to sell off their massively inflated homes and apartments for handsome retirements, or better yet, refinance their mortgages on the fly, so as to generate precious liquidities for investment on the surging stock-markets. The masters of the regenerated inner city are indeed a new gentry, flush with the returns on their exclusive titles to nobility: the ownership deeds granting them a stake in the global boom of urban centrality.

What then of the city as a collective project, which alone makes this kind of individual jackpot possible? Jason Hackworth has shown how cities in the USA, then increasingly around the world, have had recourse to only three bond-rating agencies in order to make their municipal bonds attractive as a secure, blue-chip investment for pension funds and other large portfolio administrators.<sup>2</sup> The key transformation of the 1980s and 1990s, in Hackworth's analysis of the American data, is the relative eclipse of local banks as major buyers

on the bond markets and the corresponding rise of institutional investors without any detailed knowledge of the urban environment. Under these conditions, the role of the Nationally Recognized Statistical Rating Organizations – Moody's, Standard & Poor's and Fitch – is to provide authoritative guarantees of future profitability, absolving fund managers from any possible accusation of undue risk-taking. Indeed, binding regulation prohibits many pension funds from acquiring any but the highest-ranked securities. The advantages for distant institutional investors of such close surveillance of urban development projects were irresistible. With the volume of investment rising globally and capital pouring into municipal bond markets from sources as far away as Saudi Arabia or China, the rating agencies came to reign supreme over infrastructural planning, not only in the US but throughout the world. To facilitate the management of budgets, projects are often spun off into specially chartered "districts" (airport district, sewage district, etc.) which may also be configured as private-public partnerships. In addition to the standardized development pattern that this process imposes, what results above all is a loss of democratic oversight as

**The masters of the regenerated inner city are indeed a new gentry, flush with the returns on their exclusive titles to nobility: the ownership deeds granting them a stake in the global boom of urban centrality.**

increasingly large tracts of urban land are managed according to the dictates of the ratings agencies, and in some cases handed over to quasi-non-governmental organizations, or "quangos" as they are called in Great Britain. The double negation of "quasi" and "non" says a lot about how much can be hidden in this process. The juridical basis of public space falls into the legal gap between public and private.

What drives cities toward this opaque but highly orchestrated process of total makeover? The big prize, as Saskia Sassen pointed out almost two decades ago, is the status of "global city," or command and control center of the world economy.<sup>3</sup> The key attributes here are full integration to global financial flows, top-quality information and transportation infrastructure, and "world class" real-estate markets and cultural amenities making the city attractive for the most qualified

corporate personnel. While it is obvious that only a few cities can ever obtain this position (Sassen herself focused only on New York, London and Tokyo), still enormous sums are spent by competing metropolises all over the world in hopes of moving up the ranks of global integration. In the historically dominant financial capitals and among the serious new contenders such as Shanghai, Sydney, Sao Paulo, Brussels or Istanbul, what one witnesses is the wholesale retooling of parts of the city for a new kind of cosmopolitan citizen, fantastically wealthy, exceedingly well informed and uniquely demanding in matters of infrastructure, entertainment and security. The territory of this new “landed gentry” is vigilantly guarded by men in corporate uniforms with nightsticks and radios and guns, yet it cannot be reduced to the supremely valuable urban districts in which the owners physically live – for through freeways, heliports, airlines, fiber-optic cables and satellite communications systems, their territory extends to the mega-scale of the global network.

The issue today is the future of these speculatively driven models, at a time when the major attribute of the global city – finance capital – and the major source of funding for the gentrification of the second-rank cities – abundant credit – have both run into their fundamental contradiction: the inability of exploited workers and overstretched consumers to go on holding the spinning ball of golden dreams up in the air. Today we face the largest financial crisis in a century, which has not only become a crisis of the real economy in the realms of industry and trade, but also a political crisis on the streets and in the voting booths where the pressure of rapidly rising unemployment is making itself powerfully evident. Mega-gentrification has at last met its limits, and a sophisticated urban development paradigm built up over the course of three decades now stands on the verge of collapse. For community groups fighting the gentrification of their neighborhoods, or the installation of cultural and consumption facilities the first effect of which would be to erase their culture and displace their consumption to big-box wastelands, this sudden halt to the speculative boom will come as a relief, or even as a saving grace. But for everyone with a long-term interest in ecologically sustainable development, in the sharing of urban centrality with the periphery, in the production of participatory culture rather than paying entertainment, and in the democratically chosen transformation of lifestyles in full respect of those who would rather stay the same – in short, for everyone vitally interested in the grassroots exercise of the right to the city – the current crisis opens other possibilities and poses other, perhaps thornier questions.

How to find anything but a respite in a global construction downswing which could easily be as transient as those of innumerable recessions past? How to begin undoing the reflexes and reformulating the expertise accumulated over three decades of neoliberal management? How to spread an awareness of the subtle iniquities of neoliberal urbanism, at a time when far more pressing issues and varieties of political rhetoric are likely to come to the fore? How to ensure that public works projects, if they are carried out, do not merely reiterate the same illusory priorities as the credit-sponsored projects which preceded them? And above all, how to continue resisting the imposition of municipally mandated real-estate schemes

which, like everything in society, do not ever really die but instead go into a kind of living paralysis, an automated repetition whose only guarantee of continuity is the refusal of any input from the outside world? These and many other issues arising from the current crisis are far more than any single local group or social movement could ever resolve on its own. As David Harvey notes, the right to the city is “a common rather than an individual right, since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization.”<sup>4</sup> As such it demands common efforts, across local, national and even continental boundaries. And though every significant struggle happens in one single place, with one single constellation of forces, still it is high time to establish links from city to city, from country to country, from region to region – and to begin building a common grassroots paradigm of alternative urbanism, where issues of spatial justice are always granted their full weight, whatever the scales of decision.



Brian Holmes, is an art critic, cultural theorist and activist, particularly involved with the mapping of contemporary capitalism. Since the Carnival against Capital in the City of London in 1999, he has taken part in and written about many of the large demonstrations against corporate globalization around the world. This text has been slightly shortened and reprinted with the permission of the author. The full version can be found at <http://brianholmes.wordpress.com/2008/12/06/megagentrification>.

#### ENDNOTES

1. Neil Smith, “New Globalism, New Urbanism: Gentrification as Global Urban Strategy,” in *Antipode* 34/3 (July 2002). For a detailed treatment of municipal, state and corporate collaboration on urban development projects, see Erik Swyngedouw *et. al.*, “Neoliberal Urbanization in Europe: Large-Scale Urban Development Projects and the New Urban Policy,” in the same special issue of *Antipode*.
2. Jason Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology and Development in American Urbanism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).
3. Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton University Press, 1991).
4. David Harvey, “The Right to the City,” in *New Left Review* 53 (September-October 2008).

# Williamsburg After Williamsburg, Moscow After Moscow, Sydney After Sydney

16 BEAVER

## 1. ABOUT THIS IDEA OF A CALL TO VIDEOS.

**WHERE:** *There Goes The Neighbourhood* exhibition in Sydney Australia.

**WHAT:** An invite to contribute with a new video.

**WHEN:** May 1, 2009

**DURATION:** between 1 - 15 minutes

Comrades! Friends!

16beaver has been asked to contribute to the exhibition *There Goes The Neighbourhood* in Sydney this May. We would like to take this occasion as an opportunity for us all to formulate some positions and pose a few questions in relation to this moment, more specifically as it pertains to the cities or the neighborhoods we are living in, and in the light of the background texts below.

It should be a spontaneous and a light process, as we all have already thought about the issues in one way or another. The following are some of the rules we thought out to make it workable for us to put it together and also for you to be able to produce it in a short time.

### **We would like to ask you for the following:**

Choose one day, it can be from morning to night, or it can be just a fragment of an appropriate day.

Choose a place or situation that you feel needs our attention, help us better understand where the struggles are or need to be. Elicit the questions that you believe need our attention.

Together the videos will connect different geographic

points and understand how these issues get played out in different scales, in different places.

Find a mode to show, discuss, crystallize the problems you feel are connected to the short text we have written below.

The video can be highly edited or it can be casual. All videos will be made available and a selection will be made for a series of screenings.

If there is a very good reason to break any of the rules above, please do so, but it has to be a reason that will help the subject matter, and without which the issue at hand would not manifest itself so easily.

This is not necessarily a work about the financial meltdown, nor about gentrification. It is more a work about:

- How the economic logic that has prevailed for the last decades has transformed the spaces we live in radically.
- How that spatial politics has played out on different levels of society.
- How artists may contribute to formulating the necessary questions and shaping a different way of seeing not only the challenges confronted today but also the possible opportunities.

The resulting video can be anywhere from 1 to 15 minutes.

## 2. SOME BACKGROUND RELATING TO GENTRIFICATION WALKS AND IDEAS.

Two years ago, we organised a walk with Keg de Souza (from SquatSpace) in New York entitled "From Lower East Side to Sydney." The walk was

connected to an earlier one “Williamsburg after Williamsburg / Moscow after Moscow”, organized in 2006 with Not An Alternative and colleagues from Moscow and St. Petersburg, who were visiting us from the Karl Marx School of the English Language and the Chto Delat (What is to be Done?).

Both of these walks were modest efforts to connect our lived spaces to dynamics we had been speaking about over many years within various contexts, conversations, events. They were also dynamics which were central to the collective research conducted under the heading of Continental



Walking tour of the Lower East Side, 16beaver, 2007.  
Photo by Keg de Souza.

Drift. In these conversations and inquiries, there remained a consistent effort to re-visit language and terminologies and to understand the dynamics which were swiftly transforming urban centres (and former rural areas) worldwide.

The push through our neighbourhoods felt like an irresistible force. Buildings around us were being bought, sold, destroyed, newly built. Evictions, evacuations, and exodus. In every city we visited, we experienced something similarly violent, similarly speculative, similarly unsustainable. In the last session of Continental Drift held in New York, we decided to invite Neil Smith to talk about a dynamic which we sensed was beyond what was traditionally known as gentrification. Since it seemed that the entire globe was being gentrified.

We described the phenomenon like this:

“In the last years, we have been witnessing an extreme intensification of investment and speculation in property. This has of course led to wide scale construction and development proposals in all parts of the globe. At the heart and fringe of nearly each of these developments, one can find the inherent contradictions of this process referred to as globalisation. Here one finds the losers of the equation as well. The people who are forced out, not given a choice or a voice, evacuated, or simply played out of the game. In this game, each specific city or zone of re-development, appears as a kind of experiment to broaden and extend the vocabulary of neoliberalism. And it is in this extension, this

apparent experimentation that today’s resistance runs into some corners. As we struggle with our vocabulary, the facts continue to be created on the ground. How to name and describe these processes today? Can we imagine a short list of terms which could help us construct a map of current processes being enacted upon urban centers globally? If terms like gentrification and uneven development are insufficient, might we need to invent new terms? Or may it just be a question of dusting off some old books, revisiting and rethinking some older insights.”

In his talk, Neil Smith suggested we call it Mega-Gentrification. He explained how the meaning of the word has shifted from Ruth Glass’s first usage of the term gentrification to describe London in 1964. He emphasized how the geography of gentrification has changed from the Victorian cottages Glass was describing. How re-zoning and redevelopment processes of entire neighbourhoods which occur largely through state assistance, intervention, or facilitation have changed the scale, velocity, and intensity of what we know as gentrification.

He described the migration of the term and the dynamic we refer to as gentrification in three phases:

Phase 1, was a not-quite accidental process, a house here, house there, centrally located in the city, but not well tied into the housing market.

Phase 2, in a city like New York, lasted from 1981 to 1991. It was a period in which the gentrification process stopped being so accidental. Much more systematically involved and rooted in the housing market as such and in the restructuring of the labor economy. Larger banks became much more involved. One of the key examples is the gentrification of Harlem for which a committee was created by the city to make a study. The language they used said, “If you look at Harlem, what we see is massive inequality, social imbalance, so it needs state assistance, to have greater balance.” But since 95% of Harlem was African-American, greater balance and equality meant bringing in wealthier and whiter people. And though the state was involved through the Harlem Urban Task Force, with recession, gentrification slowed down.

Phase 3, begins in New York between 1994 and 1996 as the housing crisis comes to an end. The first paradigmatic building in this period was built in the Lower East Side, Avenue B and Second street. It was a condominium with 62 units built between 1997-98, using non-union labor, an Israeli developer, a Bangladeshi architect, using money from Europe American Import bank, fairly high scale global capital. So what you begin to get is tying gentrification into these much larger global circuits of capital and not just cultural capital of art world and artists. In this third phase, gentrification becomes a central part of urban policy. Moreover, the process expands geographically outward and moves away from the abandoned urban centres.

In his talk, Neil asserted that there may be a good argument that we are in the 4th phase. But more likely, he surmised, this could be the end of the 3rd phase, as the sub-prime mortgage disaster turns into a full fledged financial crisis far exceeding the housing market. As we write this text nearly one

year later, that bubble has burst and the impacts are rippling far beyond the housing sector.

If we follow Neil Smith's argument, this third phase of gentrification was global in nature. It was massive and involved not only abstract financial instruments, but money, expertise, ideas, labor force borrowed from all parts of the world. It was connected not only with the racism and class power dynamic which marked earlier phases of gentrification, but also involving governments in collusion with, often working in the service of, bankers, investors, developers.

Departing from some of Neil's arguments, our colleague and fellow drifter, Brian Holmes has more recently contributed a text under the heading of *Mega-Gentrification* exploring these points further [see page 57 – editors' note].

### 3. MORE BACKGROUND RELATING TO THE ECONOMY AND THE NEW HORIZON.

In September of 2008, we conducted an open-door meeting at 16beaver on the financial debacle and the possibilities for artists, activists, cultural practitioners, and whichever singularities. One of the many points made in this discussion was that this crisis was an opportunity, an opening, into a new horizon.

People from around the world witness, not unlike the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, the collapse of a whole other ideology. One which purported not to be an ideology or belief yet was laden with values which were thrust upon the multitudes as reality, or necessity, or the way things work. An idea-ology which was assisted with concepts like, reality is not something to be contested, but is composed of facts, numbers, statistics, models, .... and all we need is capable technocrats who can balance productivity, economic growth, inflation, etc...

What happens when this reality is exposed to be untenable, not only socially, politically, personally, ecologically, but also economically?

Even the wealthiest "financial minds" are embarrassed, some only because they have been caught in their incompetencies, others, because they really believed this system of values.

Words like freedom, democracy, liberty, equality, self-determination, justice all of which mobilised massive movements within former socialist countries and places like China, South Africa and Occupied Palestine in the late 80s appear now to have lost their coordinates or anchors. Wars, civil and inter-national, overlap and scar many parts of the world.

Socially and subjectively, much of what the world of research and technological advancement can offer as assistance to the increased psychological demands on individuals living in precarity and insecurity are either: a. objects of fetish which serve as pacifiers to sustains a life of the saddest passions, of impotence, and a condition of voicelessness; or b. a litany of psychological medications packaged to serve diagnoses that did not even exist a few decades

ago. Every solution for humankind needs first to be a solution for a "market", an industry. Can this inverted logic be tolerated and re-invested in with our lives?

The struggle for nationhood, independence, anti-imperialism or colonialism have also produced ample results to understand that a new regime run with elections does not produce any greater proximity to the a collective desire to shed this condition of voicelessness and impotence.

Even with all of the industrial revolutions, one cannot imagine a less mobile time than our own, where thousands risk their lives daily to cross borders, for search of survival. If ever, there was a litmus for our collective bankruptcy; the need to rethink the entire way we share this planet with all living and non-living things, the need to critique a belief in progress, it would be the ecological devastation which has impacted the entire planet. Yet, the only solutions we have been told, will again come within the same economic logic of "market" solutions, further abstract financial instruments, and unaccountable logic which has brought about this catastrophe.

Universities and educational institutions, rather than serving as places to rethink politics, community, and how people can share the universe, have instead served increasingly as vocational training centers or sites of inculcation, where students are trained to be better integrated into the system, to compete with fellow peers and to be capable to survive in the "real world."

Of course, this "real world" is crumbling, the results of the past 35 years are devastating. Now, the economic logic, the very ground upon which struggles for collective social justice, which erupted in the 60s and early 70s, were quelled; the ground upon which any competing or alternative proposals for the conditions of sharing a land or territories or a world were discredited, has itself fallen into disrepute. This very logic has proven itself to be what capitalism has always worked for and been run by, a highly centralized and concentrated group of elites, assisted by governments which work for their cause.

We have been sold terms like free-markets *ad infinitum*, but when times get rough (this is not the first crisis capitalism has faced), it is the people who have to bear the losses. Private gain, public loss. This is the history which is repeating itself. This is the logic that is more blatantly exposed than it has in recent history. Of course, the logic can also be extended to a critique of the state itself, of governance, of the ever greater mixture of economy (oikos) and politics (polis), so that they have become indiscernible.

But we will stop our short and rather general statement here. Can people continue to autistically proceed as if this time is like any other time? Or are there moments which offer themselves as small openings in the seemingly chronological march of time, moments which call for considered, collective utterances? If so, that time would seem to be now.

A world of our making awaits our response.



# Normalising Copenhagen: Revolt and Gentrification

JAKOB JAKOBSEN

*We can get a dream of a price for that site, and I won't deny that economics are involved here* – H. Thulstrup Hansen, Cultural Mayor of Copenhagen

*It will have a substantial negative effect on house prices and is certainly something the individual home seller and buyer will feel.* – Thomas Torp, Deputy Chairman of the real estate confederation Danske Ejendomsmæglere.

**In the Spring of 2007** Copenhagen was in the grip of widespread social unrest and street fighting. The disturbances culminated on March 1 when Ungdomshuset (“The Youth House”) an anarchist social centre, was cleared by the Copenhagen Police in collaboration with the Anti-Terror Corps and the Army. Over the next few weeks the city neighbourhood Nørrebro was ravaged by burning barricades, street fighting and endless clouds of tear gas. The police were forced to impose special emergency zones, and after a week had arrested up to 1000 activists, about 300 of whom were imprisoned. The extent of the social unrest came as a surprise to most people – to the Copenhagen City Council, which

had been the catalyst for the clearance of the Youth House, and to the environment around the Youth House, which had hitherto functioned as a typical left-radical subculture.

Since the mid-1990s Copenhagen had been in the throes of a large housing and property boom along the lines of developments in other big western cities. The average price per square metre for an owner-occupier flat had risen more than 600% between 1995 and 2006 in the Copenhagen Council area. At the same time there had been an explosion in private construction for both commerce and housing. A new city neighbourhood, Ørestad, had shot up with an emphasis on commercial construction, but also



The adventure playground before the clearance, 1980.

with housing intended for up to 20,000 residents. The new neighbourhood was linked with the other neighbourhoods of Copenhagen by a brand new Metro system. In parallel with this, the construction of public housing and public institutions has declined. So over a period of 10-15 years Copenhagen has become a city of rapid economic development, increasingly typified by spectacular architecture, luxury goods shops and fast, exclusive cars. At the same time developments have been marked by increasing social exclusion, and for many people the clearing of the Youth House was the straw that broke the camel's back and unleashed fury in the streets.

In other words the urban development of Copenhagen has been characterised by processes in which less affluent parts of the population have quietly and steadily been pushed out of their neighbourhoods by more prosperous ones. At the same time, whole neighbourhoods have arisen where the very well-off are able to buy homes. This social selection has taken place throughout Copenhagen, but has crystallized in different ways in various neighbourhoods. For example within the last thirty years the Nørrebro neighbourhood has been through several rounds of urban renewal where the traditional residents with a working-class background have been pushed out by better-off groups with higher education, and most recently by the so-called "creative class", who found out that the cultural and multicultural profile of the area was a good mirror of their identity. This meant that the housing prices in certain areas of Nørrebro rose to the highest per square metre in Copenhagen.

At the same time the influx of immigrants, especially to the public housing that emerged from the urban renewal in the 1980s, created a new demography and generated new class tensions in the neighbourhood.

There can be no doubt that the whole process surrounding the sale and clearance of the Youth House can be regarded as part of a larger urban policy, a gentrification process that has affected Nørrebro and the rest of Copenhagen over the past 10-20 years. In 2001 the City Council decided to get rid of the Youth House through what it saw as a very shrewd manoeuvre, consisting of selling off the building without regard to the users of the house. The response of the activists in the house was to set up a banner stating: "For Sale – including 500 stone-throwing, autonomous, violent psychopaths from Hell". The Youth House was subsequently sold to an investor who later turned out to represent a fundamentalist Christian sect. The former Copenhagen mayor for cultural affairs, H. Thulstrup Hansen, stated in connection with the sale: "We can get a dream of a price for that site, and I won't deny that economics are involved here. If we printed money ourselves, I wouldn't care that 20-30 young people get something out of the house. But that is a poor use of a very exclusively located property" – a quote that provides a more structural explanation of the background for the processes that led to the sale and later to the clearance of the Youth House.

Using Neil Smith's model of gentrification, [see page 61 -editors' note] it is possible to identify three waves

of urban change in Copenhagen. The development of the area popularly known as Pisserenden (“the Piss Gutter”) in the inner city can probably be described as a kind of sporadic gentrification: in the 1960s and 1970s hippies gradually moved in and helped to replace the population in the area, which was otherwise typified by craft industries and residents with a working-class background. The development of Pisserenden in many ways recalls that of Carnaby Street in Soho, London. Today it is a cultural area typified by well established fashion boutiques, expensive homes and cafés, mostly oriented towards the “tourists” in the area.

The second form of “systematic gentrification” was applied to the former slum area known as “The Black Quadrangle” in Inner Nørrebro, where whole housing areas were cleared in accordance with an overall plan initiated by the council. This so-called urban renewal had the aim of completely changing the urban structure of the area. Urban renewal in the 1970s and 1980s led to a fundamental transformation of the demography of the area and was characterised by a major exodus of the area’s traditional residents.

The clearance of Nørrebro led to extensive social unrest: it flared up in 1980 with the “Battle for Byggeren” (Byggeren, “the Builder” was an adventure playground in the Black Quadrangle). The ensuing disturbances sent shock waves through the whole of Danish society with spectacular blockades by residents and confrontations with the police. In an attempt to create better conditions for the children of the area a local residents’ group took the initiative to create an adventure playground on one of the empty sites in the area, which had lain idle as a result of the extensive demolition of the obsolete buildings that the incipient urban renewal process had started. When the council’s plans for new construction were to be implemented, the police were called in to clear the playground. This sparked a great deal of unrest and barricading of the whole of Inner Nørrebro for an extended period, before the council, with the aid of the police, levelled the playground. The resistance to the council’s plan was rooted in widespread fear that the new housing project would be too expensive to live in for the residents of the neighbourhood – the council had in fact stated that it wanted to build homes for “better taxpayers”.

The playground was lost, but the very next year, in 1981, a new movement began to occupy empty properties in Nørrebro. This squatter movement started as “the initiative group for a new Youth House” and in the course of 1981 and 1982 it occupied a number of properties. The movement also occupied residential properties, since the squatters wanted to create new kinds of collective dwellings for young people in the city. Once more it was mainly in Nørrebro that the house occupations took place. These struggles culminated in January 1983 when most of the occupied properties in Nørrebro were cleared by the police in a large-scale, militarised police action. And with this “the Black Quadrangle” was lost. There was only one exception. Just before the final clearance, as an attempt to ward off the upcoming confrontation, the Copenhagen City Council offered the squatters’ movement an empty house, the former “People’s House” at Jagtvej 69, which was inaugurated as the Youth House on 1st October 1982. In that sense the Youth House remained as a monument to

one of the few victories in the urban struggles that typified the systematic gentrification of Copenhagen in the 1970s and 1980s. The urban renewal of the Black Quadrangle in Nørrebro was however the end of an urban political praxis based on the Keynesian welfare and redistribution ideas that had permeated the political rationale in Denmark since World War II. Systematic gentrification was a cohesive, centrally planned transformation of certain run-down housing areas characterised by a working class population, and this gentrification resulted in an almost complete change in the composition of the population in the areas in question over a period of years, just as had happened in the Black Triangle in Nørrebro.

The third phase, “general form of gentrification”, is the form we mainly encounter today and it is typified by its global character. In other words it is a form where the gentrification takes place not only in limited areas and internally in the cities, but also on a global scale between cities and between parts of the world. This kind of gentrification is as a rule based on market premises, is controlled by capital interests and is launched as collaborative projects between public and private interests. If we look at a quite specific area in Nørrebro – the public square Skt. Hans Torv and the neighbourhood around the street Elmegade – development in that area over the last 10-15 years is a good example of “public-private” free market gentrification. Hand in hand with the private urban renewal where owners of properties could get subsidies to refurbish their properties and beautify the facades, and the “parent-purchase” scheme, where the well-off could buy flats for their children with favourable tax conditions, the streets, squares and pavements were renewed and the facades were cleaned of graffiti by way of various campaigns and projects. Thus a whole series of factors quietly and gradually made the area attractive to new affluent groups. The process was symbolically launched by the renovation of Skt. Hans Torv and the erection of the enormous granite sculpture in the middle of the square in 1993. After all it was not aimed at the traditional residents of the area, who would probably rather have kept the hot dog stand in the middle of the square. The sculpture and the new square were part of a reorientation of the area towards middle-class values and taste – where art was of course a particularly important marker. Within ten years all the pubs and bars on the square have been replaced by upmarket cafés with new tastes and a brand new clientele (and a new price bracket). At the same time the square-metre price of the owner-occupier flats in the area has skyrocketed, and today the neighbourhood around Skt Hans Torv is one of the most expensive areas in Copenhagen – the composition of the population in the neighbourhood has presumably been almost completely replaced. This area is a fine example of the third wave of gentrification – where private capital supported by the local authority has been the determining factor.

The assault on the Youth House and likely imminent dismantling of the “free city” Christiania are part of a radical capitalisation process in Copenhagen. In this process it is not permitted for areas to lie unused or to function according to principles that are inefficient in terms of the merciless appetite of the neoliberal economy. One may well regard the neoliberal normalisation of these places as a precondition for the unfolding of general gentrification; but it is also



The Youth House before the clearance on March 1, 2007.



1. Promotional photo from the Ørestad Corporation. 2. The streets of Nørrebro on the night of March 1st 2007. 3. Front banner of the G13 demonstration and mass squatting action October 5, 2007. Photo: Mark Knudsen, Monsun. 4. The main entrance of Christiania. Photo: Gregory Donovan. 5 Barricade in Nørrebrogade during the Battle for the Adventure Playground in April 1980.

integrated in it. After 2001, Christiania again became controversial after being allowed to remain as a semi-legalised experimental urban area for many years. As an element in the campaign for market adaptation and financialisation of the values of society, Christiania was cited by the right-wing Danish Government as an example of how badly things can go if one does not follow general market principles in a particular area. Christiania was asserted to be a source of crime and drug abuse. A wide-ranging plan was therefore initiated to “normalise” Christiania, as it was put. Christiania is based on collective ownership

# For Sale – including 500 stone-throwing, autonomous, violent psychopaths from Hell

and direct resident democracy, and in connection with the normalisation the first step was to force Christiania’s residents to declare their private interests in the “free city”. In this way the authorities wished to undermine the collective ownership principle. At the same time they wanted to limit Christiania’s self-determination and to build new homes in the central parts of the free city in parallel with a “restoration” to their original historical appearance of the old rampart areas that form the residential area of Christiania. Thus on the pretext of preserving cultural heritage they can remove all the fantastical buildings that the residents of the free city have built on the ramparts over the years.

Christiania is centrally located in Copenhagen, and that kind of alternative to the market economy can thus no longer be permitted to lie there according to neoliberal logic. In the case of Christiania, normalisation will mean that the free city will completely lose its independence, and no matter which solution is chosen there will be a replacement of the residents, such that well-adjusted liberal middle-class groups with good creative jobs will move into the coming state-sanctioned experimental projects and oust many of the original Christianites. The hippies, the Greenlanders, the flip-outs and the homeless who frequented the area will be removed or will feel obliged to find other places to survive, while what is perhaps the last “free” area in the city that is not fully integrated in the capitalist expansion will vanish and everything will become “normal”.

The gentrification processes have of course encountered various kinds of resistance throughout history. The resistance to the first sporadic gentrification often took the form of tenants’ organisations or local residents’ actions, where locals joined forces to strengthen their solidarity and preserve the collectivity. At the same time these residents’ organisations could put pressure on local politicians. The resistance to systematic gentrification, as we have seen, often took the form of widespread occupations of properties which were left empty during the exodus of the original residents. These occupations often escalated and led to rioting and social unrest and thus helped show that the systematic gentrification was in many ways a failure, since it quite simply created too many problems for the local authorities. The third gentrification phase, general gentrification, is what we are currently confronted with, and it is countered by various forms of resistance. One good example is of course the rioting around the Youth House, which is said to have made the housing prices drop in Nørrebro – and this de-gentrifying effect has been clearly documented in connection with the plans to locate a new Youth House on the street Frederikssundsvej, where local residents threatened the council with compensation claims if their homes lost value because of a new Youth House in the area. Thomas Torp, deputy director of the realtors’ organisation Danske Ejendomsmæglere, said in this connection to *Nyhedsavisen*: “It will have a substantial negative effect on house prices and is certainly something the individual home seller and buyer will feel.” What is a negative effect for the homeowners is a positive effect for others, including the marginalised and all kinds of alternative lifestyles and anti-capitalist behaviour and attitudes.

Looking at the housing price index for Nørrebro, the square-metre price peaked in the spring of 2007 and has later dropped considerably. This happened concurrently with the revolt around the Youth House. Of course the unrest alone did not cause this price drop; it was also influenced by general economic factors. But I would claim that there is a relationship between the colossal expansion of the housing market and the widespread social unrest that struck Copenhagen in 2007. Which caused which is in this context is beside the point – the fact is that the urban-political situation in Copenhagen generated a revolt the extent of which took most people by surprise.



Jakob Jakobsen is a visual artist, activist and organiser living and working in Copenhagen. His main activities include the Copenhagen Free University (2001 - 2007) ([copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk](http://copenhagenfreeuniversity.dk)) and the Infopool network in London. He was co-founder and the first chair of the UKK (Young Art Workers) in Denmark 2002-2003 and has been involved in organising seminars about and protests for workers/migrants rights and autonomous spaces in Copenhagen within recent years.

Urban Flight  
Comix Presents

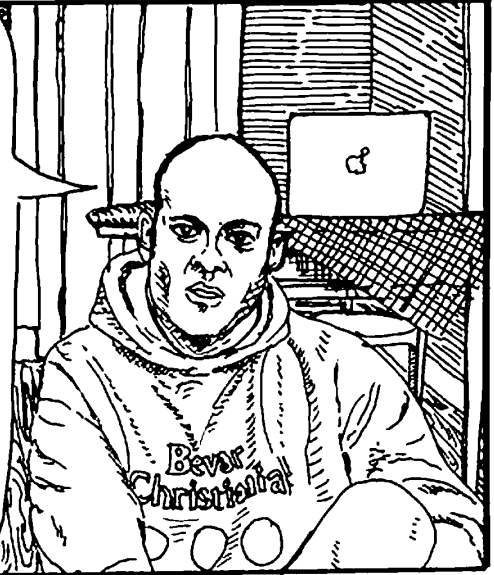
Michael J. Biers

# WHAT IS THE MYSTERY?

A tale in eight parts

This work was made possible by the  
Christiania Researcher  
in Residence Program

I came to Christiania in early march, living here for about a month; I observed the daily police patrols, the clandestine hash economy, the nervous uncertainty about the state and city commune's plan to "normalize" Christiania. Was it out of blind principal or cynical self-interest that politicians objected to Christiania? Was there an alternative view? It was the uncertainty about the government's motivation that generated the pervasive paranoia all around. That is how it felt to me.



One day I took a walk on the still-frozen lake.



A swan walked on the ice, taking to flight when I approached. Its wings made an ominous sound echoing off the ice.



Near the little island I found a half-submerged boat flying a Christiania flag—was this an image of Christiania or an image in Christiania?



Soon, I determined to produce a feuilleton for the Ugaspejlet. Perhaps a work based on historical facts, like Chinatown, that, through the codes of the detective genre, tells a true story.



Every detective story needs a secret. Martha Rosler, the American artist, has written:

"The secret is that to know the meaning of a culture you must recognize - the limits of your own."



So from the beginning I felt apprehensive about my project, about my capacity to learn the secret of Christiania.

Nevertheless, I surmised there were two secrets: one having to do with how the inhabitants of Christiania envision and manifest an image of their community and another about why the state and municipality were so eager to end Christiania. Maybe the first thing was to find a detective. Then maybe I'd discover the mystery.



WHAT IS THE MYSTERY? Part II



One day I stopped by Emmerik Warburg's house. A young woman was there—Lisa Madsen. Emmerik said to me: "Here's your detective."

Lisa had a detective alter-ego. Previously he had starred in a mystery involving a Madrid woman who Lisa's collaborator thought was in need of a little "excitement." Now she wanted to move into a vacant trailer in Christiania's New Forrest neighborhood, optimistically placing her shingle out front.



We agreed to collaborate. At our first meeting, Lisa brought up the dream-image idea I was also thinking of.

It's as if Christiania needs to be embodied in a mental image that can be projected onto the physical world.

Maybe the conflict with the government is a contest of images. The government wants to impose its own dream-image.



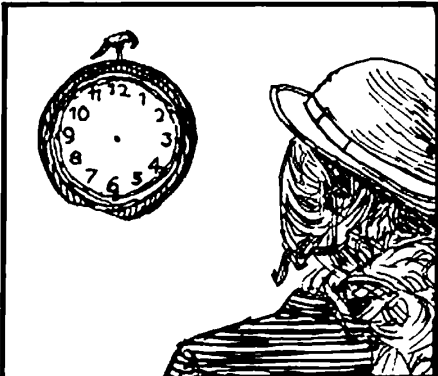
One could describe the image-ideal / dream-image as a representation of utopian counter-ideology. For instance, this photograph from the Christiania website seems to do more than merely illustrate.



Places like Christiania are what Michel Foucault terms "heterotopias", a kind of effectively enacted utopia. They mirror society while retaining images from past utopian aspirations.



Reflections of Christiania can be found in communes, squats, religious communities, hobo camps, and favelas.



There was something else, Lisa thought. If Christiania space was hetero-topic, Christiania time was what Foucault would term "heterochronous". Lisa pictured it as lying at the center of a clock deprived of its hands, rotating imperceptibly on its axis.

This image had something to do with Lisa's ongoing negotiations to move into the vacant trailer.





**WHAT IS THE MYSTERY? Part III:**  
After talking about Christiania in these speculative terms, I began sketching out my idea for a detective story.

Someone disappears and when they show up again, they're changed. They've become an agitator for the government or something...brainwashed.

How does the detective get involved? Who hires him?



Someone hiring the detective is only a pretext. Philip Marlowe is always "hired", but he ends up staying on the case for personal reasons. But anyway, I have an image of the detective lying in bed thinking when there's a knock on the door. A friend of the missing person has come asking for help.



So this guy has been brain-washed and is taking orders from the government. I don't know what he can do. It's not so easy to manipulate a community of anarchists. What's he supposed to accomplish?



Well, people in the government want to create a Christiania-land, a historical re-enactment where everyone is playing the role of hippies living in a free community. Tourists would be charged admission.

And build a big parking lot for tour buses and cars.

Maybe a resort hotel and more shopping...boutiques.



Craft workshops and a big water slide on the lake. So the brainwashed guy is trying to work to get the hold-outs to agree to this?

Something like that.

People here would never go for it.



But didn't you tell me there were different camps—some who want to cooperate with the government and others who think any compromise is unacceptable?

Okay, so, the detective discovers this plot. Then what happens?



I was thinking the kidnapped guy comes on like he's had a religious awakening. He reappears on Easter Sunday and starts preaching about Christiania-land.

And then?

I don't know. It's unclear what should happen.



You need to meet Joker. He's got a lot of stories...a very vivid imagination. I think he'd be able to help us.



To be continued...

# Fortress Los Angeles: The Militarization Of Urban Space

MIKE DAVIS

**I**n Los Angeles - once a paradise of free beaches, luxurious parks, and "cruising strips" - genuinely democratic space is virtually extinct. The pleasure domes of the elite Westside rely upon the social imprisonment of a third-world proletariat in increasingly repressive ghettos and barrios. In a city of several million aspiring immigrants (where Spanish-surname children are now almost two-thirds of the school-age population), public amenities are shrinking radically, libraries and playgrounds are closing, parks are falling derelict, and streets are growing ever more desolate and dangerous.

Here, as in other American cities, municipal policy has taken its lead from the security offensive and the middle-class demand for increased spatial and social insulation. Taxes previously targeted for traditional public spaces and recreational facilities have been redirected to support corporate redevelopment projects. A pliant city government - in the case of Los Angeles, one ironically professing to represent a liberal biracial coalition - has collaborated in privatising public space and subsidising new exclusive enclaves (benignly called "urban villages"). The celebratory language used to describe contemporary Los Angeles - "urban renaissance," "city of the future." and so on - is only a triumphal gloss laid over the brutalisation of its inner-city neighbourhoods and the stark divisions of class and race represented in its built environment. Urban form obediently follows repressive function. Los Angeles, as always in the vanguard, offers an especially disturbing guide to the emerging liaisons between urban architecture and the police state.

## **Forbidden city**

Los Angeles's first spatial militarist was the legendary General Harrison Gray Otis, proprietor of the *Times* and implacable foe of organised labour.

In the 1830s, after locking out his union printers and announcing a crusade for "industrial freedom," Otis retreated into a new *Times* building designed as a fortress with grim turrets and battlements crowned by a bellicose bronze eagle. To emphasise his truculence, he later had a small, functional cannon installed on the hood of his Packard touring car. Not surprisingly, this display of aggression produced a response in kind. On October 1, 1910, the heavily fortified *Times* headquarters - the command-post of the open shop on the West Coast - was destroyed in a catastrophic explosion, blamed on union saboteurs.

Eighty years later, the martial spirit of General Otis pervades the design of Los Angeles's new Downtown, whose skyscrapers march from Bunker Hill down the Figueroa corridor. Two billion dollars of public tax subsidies have enticed big banks and corporate headquarters back to a central city they almost abandoned in the 1960s. Into a waiting grid, cleared of tenement housing by the city's powerful and largely unaccountable redevelopment agency, local developers and offshore investors have planted a series of block-square complexes: Crocker Centre, the Bonaventure Hotel and Shopping Mall, the World Trade Centre, California Plaza, Arco Center, and so on. With an increasingly dense and self-contained circulation system linking these superblocks, the new financial district is best conceived as a single, self-referential hyperstructure, a Miesian skyscape of fantastic proportions.

Like similar megalomaniacal complexes tethered to fragmented and desolate downtowns - such as the Renaissance Center in Detroit and the Peachtree and Omni centers in Atlanta - Bunker Hill and the Figueroa corridor have provoked a storm of objections to their abuse of scale and composition, their denigration of street life, and their confiscation of the vital energy of the center, now sequestered within their subterranean concourses or privatized

plazas. Sam Hall Kaplan, the former design critic of the *Times*, has vociferously denounced the anti-street bias of redevelopment; in his view, the superimposition of “hermetically sealed fortresses” and random “pieces of suburbia” onto Downtown has “killed the street” and “dammed the rivers of life.”

Yet Kaplan’s vigorous defense of pedestrian democracy remains grounded in liberal complaints about “bland design” and “elitist planning practices.” Like most architectural critics, he rails against the oversights of urban design without conceding a dimension of foresight, and even of deliberate repressive intent. For when Downtown’s new “Gold Coast” is seen in relation to other social landscapes in the central city, the “fortress effect” emerges, not as an inadvertent failure of design, but as an explicit - and, in its own terms, successful socio-spatial strategy.

The goals of this strategy may be summarised as a double repression: to obliterate all connection with Downtown’s past and to prevent any dynamic association with the non-Anglo urbanism of its future. Los Angeles is unusual among major urban centres in having preserved, however negligently, most of its Beaux Arts commercial core. Yet the city chose to transplant - at immense public cost - the entire corporate and financial district from around Broadway and Spring Street to Bunker Hill, a half-dozen blocks further west.

Photographs of the old Downtown in its 1940s prime show crowds of black, and Mexican shoppers of all ages and classes. The contemporary “renaissance” renders such heterogeneity virtually impossible. It is intended not to “kill the street” as Kaplan feared, but to “kill the crowd,” to eliminate that democratic mixture that Olmsted believed was America’s antidote to European class polarisation. The new Downtown is designed to ensure a seamless continuum of middle-class work, consumption, and recreation, insulated from the city’s unsavory streets. Ramparts and battlements, reflective glass and elevated pedways, are tropes in an architectural language warning off the underclass Other. Although architectural critics are usually blind to this militarised syntax, urban pariah groups whether black men, poor Latino immigrants, or elderly homeless white females - read the signs immediately.

## Mean streets

This strategic armouring of the city against the poor is especially obvious at street level. In his famous study of the “social life of small urban spaces,” William Whyte points out that the quality of any urban environment can be measured, first of all, by whether there are convenient, comfortable places for pedestrians to sit. This maxim has been warmly taken to heart by designers of the high corporate precincts of Bunker Hill and its adjacent “urban villages.” As part of the city’s policy of subsidizing the white-collar residential colonisation of Downtown, tens of millions of dollars of tax revenue have been invested in the creation of attractive, “soft” environments in favoured areas. Planners envision a succession of opulent piazzas, fountains, public art, exotic shrubbery, and comfortable street furniture along a ten-block pedestrian corridor from Bunker Hill to South Park. Brochures sell Downtown’s

“livability” with idyllic representations of office workers and affluent tourists sipping cappuccino and listening to free jazz concerts in the terraced gardens of California Plaza and Grand Hope Park.

In stark contrast, a few blocks away, the city is engaged in a relentless struggle to make the streets as unlivable as possible for the homeless and the poor. The persistence of thousands of street people on the fringes of Bunker Hill and the Civic Center tarnishes the image of designer living Downtown and betrays the labouriously constructed illusion of an urban “renaissance.” City Hall has retaliated with its own version of low intensity warfare.

Although city leaders periodically propose schemes for removing indigents *en masse* - deporting them to a poor farm on the edge of the desert, confining them in camps in the mountains, or interning them on derelict ferries in the harbor - such “final solutions” have been blocked by council members’ fears of the displacement of the homeless into their districts. Instead the city, self-consciously adopting the idiom of cold war, has promoted the “containment” (the official term) of the homeless in Skid Row, along Fifth Street, systematically transforming the neighborhood into an outdoor poorhouse. But this containment strategy breeds its own vicious cycle of contradiction. By condensing the mass of the desperate and helpless together in such a small space, and denying adequate housing, official policy has transformed Skid Row into probably the most dangerous ten square blocks in the world. Every night on Skid Row is Friday the 13th, and, unsurprisingly, many of the homeless seek to escape the area during the night at all costs, searching for safer niches in other parts of Downtown. The city in turn tightens the noose with increased police harassment and ingenious design deterrents.

One of the simplest but most mean-spirited of these deterrents is the Rapid Transit District’s new barrel-shaped bus bench, which offers a minimal surface for uncomfortable sitting while making sleeping impossible. Such “bumproof” benches are being widely introduced on the periphery of Skid Row. Another invention is the aggressive deployment of outdoor sprinklers. Several years ago the city opened a Skid Row Park; to ensure that the park could not be used for overnight camping, overhead sprinklers were programmed to drench unsuspecting sleepers at random times during the night. The system was immediately copied by local merchants to drive the homeless away from (public) storefront sidewalks. Meanwhile Downtown restaurants and markets have built baroque enclosures to protect their refuse from the homeless. Although no one in Los Angeles has yet proposed adding cyanide to the garbage, as was suggested in Phoenix a few years back, one popular seafood restaurant has spent \$12,000 to build the ultimate bag-lady-proof trash cage: three-quarter-inch steel rod with alloy locks and vicious out-turned spikes to safeguard mouldering fishheads and stale french fries.

Public toilets, however, have become the real frontline of the city’s war on the homeless. Los Angeles, as a matter of deliberate policy, has fewer public lavatories than any other major North American city. On the advice of the Los Angeles police, who now sit on the “decision board” of at least

one major Downtown project, the re-development agency bulldozed the few remaining public toilets on Skid Row. Agency planners then considered whether to include a “free-standing public toilet” in their design for the upscale South Park residential development; agency chairman Jim Wood later admitted that the decision not to build the toilet was a “policy decision and not a design decision.” The agency preferred the alternative of “quasi-public restrooms” - toilets in restaurants, art galleries, and office buildings - which can be made available selectively to tourists and white-collar workers while being denied to vagrants and other unsuitables. The same logic has inspired the city’s transportation planners to exclude toilets from their designs for Los Angeles’s new subway system.



Eugene Ahn, OH Los Angeles, 1992

Bereft of toilets, the Downtown badlands east of Hill Street also lack outside water sources for drinking or washing. A common and troubling sight these days is the homeless men - many of them young refugees from El Salvador - washing, swimming, even drinking from the sewer effluent that flows down the concrete channel of the Los Angeles River on the eastern edge of Downtown. The city’s public health department has made no effort to post warning signs in Spanish or to mobilise alternative clean-water sources.

In those areas where Downtown professionals must cross paths with the homeless or the working poor - such as the zone of gentrification along Broadway just south of the Civic Centre - extraordinary precautions have been taken to ensure the separation of the different classes. The redevelopment agency, for example, brought in the police to help design “twenty-four-hour, state-of-the-art security” for the two new parking structures that serve the Los Angeles *Times* headquarters and Ronald Reagan State Office Building. In contrast to the mean streets outside, parking structures incorporate beautifully landscaped micro-parks, and one even a food court, picnic area, and historical exhibit. Both structures are intended to function as “confidence-building” circulation systems that allow white-collar workers to walk from car to office, or from car to boutique, with minimum exposure to the street. The Broadway-Spring Center, in particular, which links the two local hubs of gentrification (the Reagan Building and the proposed Grand Central Square) has been warmly praised by architectural critics for adding greenery and art to parking. It also adds a considerable dose of menace - armed guards,

locked gates, and ubiquitous security cameras - to scare away the homeless and the poor.

The cold war on the streets of Downtown is ever escalating. The police, lobbied by Downtown merchants and developers, have broken up every attempt by the homeless and their allies to create safe havens or self-governed encampments. “Justiceville”, founded by homeless activist Ted Hayes, was roughly dispersed; when its inhabitants

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attempted to find refuge at Venice Beach, they were arrested at the behest of the local council member (a renowned environmentalist) and sent back to Skid Row. The city’s own brief experiment with legalised camping - a grudging response to a series of deaths from exposure during the cold winter of 1987 - was abruptly terminated after only four months to make way for the construction of a transit maintenance yard. Current policy seems to involve perverse play upon the famous irony about the equal rights of the rich and poor to sleep in the rough. As the former head of the city planning commission explained, in the City of the Angels it is not against the law to sleep on the street *per se* “only to erect any sort of protective shelter.” To enforce this proscription

against “cardboard condos,” the police periodically sweep the Nickel, tearing down shelters, confiscating possessions, and arresting resisters. Such cynical repression has turned the majority of the homeless into urban *bedouins*. They are visible all over Downtown, pushing their few pathetic possessions in stolen shopping carts, always fugitive, always in motion, pressed between the official policy of containment and the inhumanity of downtown streets.

### **Sequestering the poor**

An insidious spatial logic also regulates the lives of Los Angeles’s working poor. Just across the moat of the Harbour Freeway, west of Bunker Hill, lies the MacArthur Park district - once upon a time the city’s wealthiest neighborhood. Although frequently characterised as a no-man’s-land awaiting resurrection by developers, the district is, in fact, home to the largest Central American community in the United States. In the congested streets bordering the park, a hundred thousand Salvadorans and Guatemalans, including a large community of Mayan-speakers, crowd into tenements and boarding houses barely adequate for a fourth as many people. Every morning at 6am this Latino Bantustan dispatches armies of sewing *operadoras*, dishwashers, and janitors to turn the wheels of the Downtown economy. But because MacArthur Park is midway between Downtown and the famous Miracle Mile, it too will soon fall to redevelopment’s bulldozers.

Hungry to exploit the lower land prices in the district, a powerful coterie of developers, represented by a famous ex-councilman and the former president of the planning commission, has won official approval for their vision of “Central City West”: literally, a second Downtown comprising 25 million square feet of new office and retail space. Although local politicians have insisted upon a significant quota of low-income replacement housing, such a palliative will hardly compensate for the large-scale population displacement sure to follow the construction of the new skyscrapers and yuppified “urban villages.” In the meantime, Korean capital, seeking *lebensraum* for Los Angeles’s burgeoning Koreatown, is also pushing into the MacArthur Park area, uprooting tenements to construct heavily fortified condominiums and office complexes. Other Asian and European speculators are counting on the new Metrorail station, across from the park, to become a magnet for new investment in the district.

The recent intrusion of so many powerful interests into the area has put increasing pressure upon the police to “take back the streets” from what is usually represented as an occupying army of drug-dealers, illegal immigrants, and homicidal homeboys. Thus in the summer of 1990 the Los Angeles Police Department announced a massive operation to “retake crime plagued MacArthur Park” and surrounding neighbourhoods “street by street, alley by alley.” While the area is undoubtedly a major drug market, principally for drive-in Anglo commuters, the police have focused not only on addict-dealers and gang members, but also on the industrious sidewalk vendors who have made the circumference of the park an exuberant swap meet. Thus Mayan women selling such local staples as tropical fruit, baby clothes, and roach spray have been rounded up in

the same sweeps as alleged “narcoterrorists” (Similar dragnets in other Southern California communities have focused on Latino day-laborers congregated at street-corner “slave markets.”)

By criminalising every attempt by the poor - whether the Skid Row homeless or MacArthur Park vendors - to use public space for survival purposes, law-enforcement agencies have abolished the last informal safety-net separating misery from catastrophe. (Few third-world cities are so pitiless.) At the same time, the police, encouraged by local businessmen and property owners, are taking the first, tentative steps toward criminalizing entire inner city communities. The “war” on drugs and gangs again has been the pretext for the LAPD’s novel, and disturbing, experiments with community blockades. A large section of the Pico-Union neighbourhood, just south of MacArthur Park, has been quarantined since the summer of 1989; “Narcotics Enforcement Area” barriers restrict entry to residents “on legitimate business only.” Inspired by the positive response of older residents and local politicians, the police have subsequently franchised “Operation *Cul-de-Sac*” to other low-income Latino and black neighbourhoods.

Thus in November 1983 (as the Berlin Wall was being demolished), the Devonshire Division of the LAPD closed off a “drug-ridden” twelve-block section of the northern San Fernando Valley. To control circulation within this largely Latino neighborhood, the police convinced apartment owners to finance the construction of a permanent guard station. Twenty miles to the south, a square mile of the mixed black and Latino Central-Avalon community has also been converted into Narcotic Enforcement turf with concrete roadblocks. Given the popularity of these quarantines - save amongst the ghetto youth against whom they are directed - it is possible that a majority of the inner city may eventually be partitioned into police-regulated “no-go” areas.

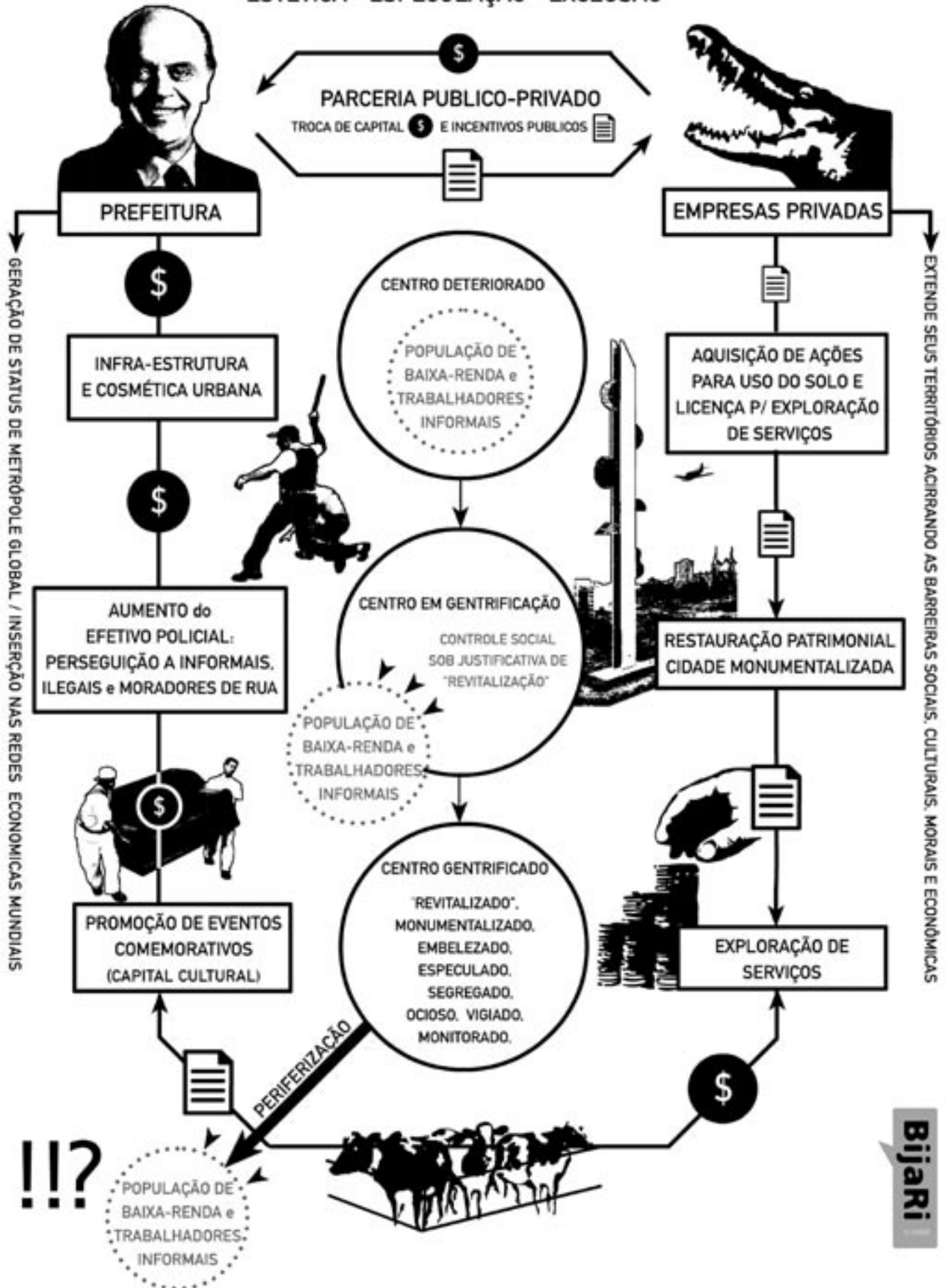
The official rhetoric of the contemporary war against the urban under-classes resounds with comparisons to the War in Vietnam a generation ago. The LAPD’s community blockades evoke the infamous policy of quarantining suspect populations in “strategic hamlets.” But an even more ominous emulation is the reconstruction of Los Angeles’s public housing projects as “defensible spaces.” Deep in the Mekong Delta of the Watts-Willowbrook ghetto, for example, the Imperial Courts Housing Project been fortified with chain-link fencing, RESTRICTED ENTRY signs, obligatory identity passes--and a substation of the LAPD. Visitors are stopped and frisked, the police routinely order residents back into their apartments at night, and domestic life is subjected to constant police scrutiny. For public-housing tenants and inhabitants of narcotic-enforcement zones, the loss of freedom is the price of “security.”

Mike Davis is a writer-activist who lives in San Diego, California. He is the author of 15 books including *City of Quartz* and *Planet of Slums*, an investigation of global urban poverty. Reprinted with permission of the author.

# Cartography of gentrification of Sao Paulo

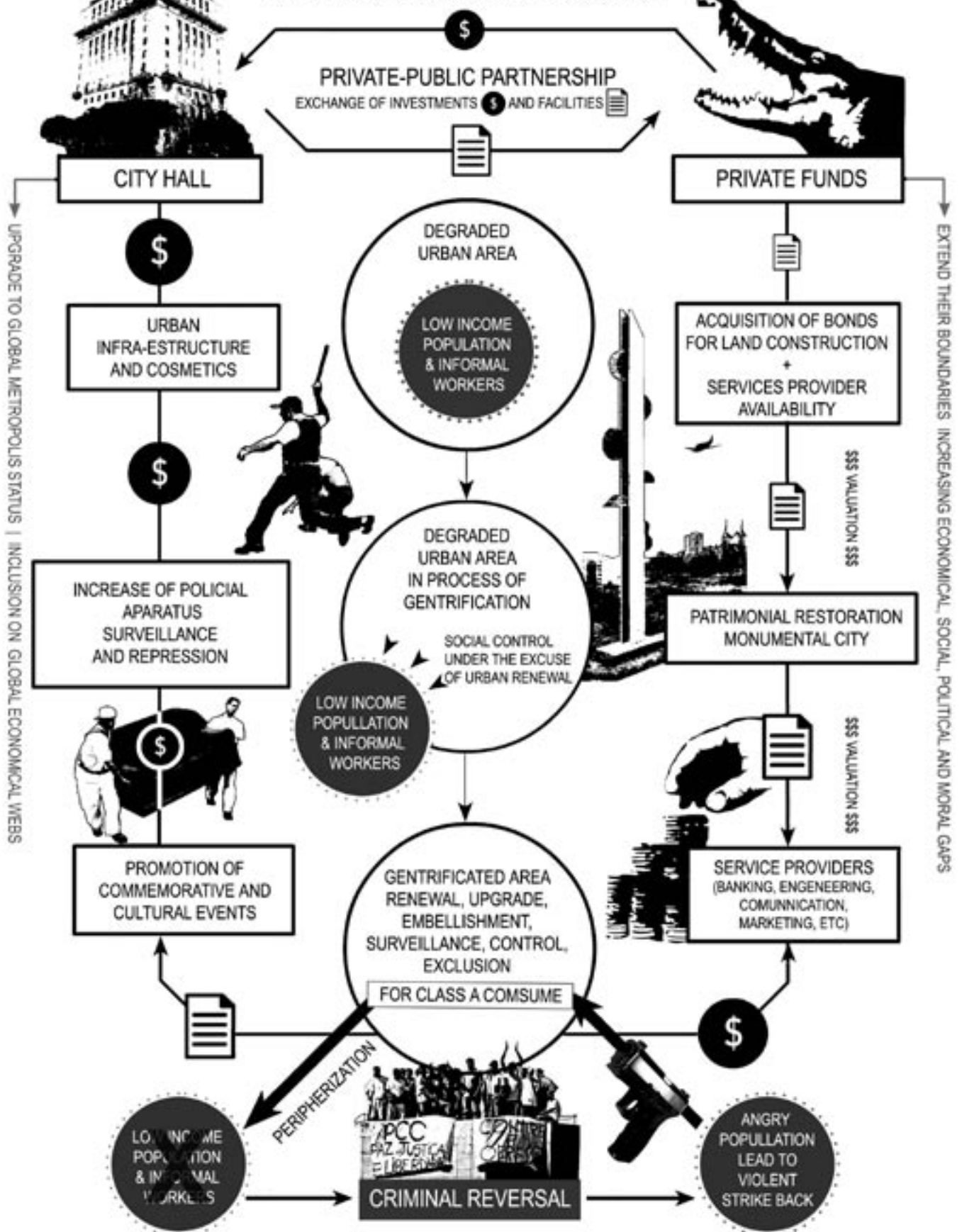
BIJARI

## OPERAÇÕES URBANAS E GENTRIFICAÇÃO ESTÉTICA - ESPECULAÇÃO - EXCLUSÃO



# URBAN RENEWAL & GENTRIFICATION

AESTHETIC + SPECULATION = EXCLUSION



GENTRIFICATION PROCESSES APHART SPACIALLY AND ECONOMICALLY TRIGGERING CONFLICTS BETWEEN CLASSES

# The Prestes Maia Occupation: Creative *Dissensus* For Social Transformation

ANDRÉ MESQUITA

*On the morning of the first eviction  
they carried out the wishes of the landlord and his son  
furniture's out on the sidewalk next to the family that little piggie went to market,  
So they're kicking out everyone  
talking about process and dismissal forced removal of the people  
on the corner shelter and location  
everybody wants somewhere  
the elected are such willing partners  
look who's buying all their tickets to the game  
development wants, development gets  
it's official  
development wants this neighbourhood  
gone so the city just wants the same talking about process and dismissal  
forced removal of the people on the corner shelter and location  
everybody wants somewhere  
everybody wants somewhere*

Fugazi –“Cashout” (2001)

**T**he story of the Prestes Maia occupation began in November 2002 when the City Centre Homeless Movement [Movimento Sem-Teto do Centro (MSTC)]<sup>1</sup> squatted a building in downtown São Paulo. When the main entrance door to the Prestes Maia was finally sealed by the City Administration in June 2007 the occupation was not only hitting the pages of mainstream newspapers and television screens but also galleries and art exhibitions around the world. How did this happen? The Prestes Maia occupation reveals how important linkages can be established between interventionist artistic practices and the squatting movement. These links were forged in an extremely conflictual context where the dwellers of the biggest Latin

American vertical squat lived with daily threats of forced eviction and police violence.

In December 2003 an exhibition called *Contemporary Art in the City Centre Squatters Movement* was held inside the occupation itself involving over 120 artists including many São Paulo art collectives such as BijaRi, Catadores de Histórias, Cia Cachorra, Coletivo Dragão da Gravura, Espaço Coringa, Experiência Imersiva Ambiental, Elefante, Esqueleto Coletivo, Frente 3 de Fevereiro, Nova Pasta and Tranca Rua. After this exhibition these art collectives started to direct part of their actions and projects towards the São Paulo city centre.

São Paulo is a contradictory city where slums, derelict buildings, homeless people, street vendors and squatters share an urban context undergoing a



ZUMBI  
SOMOS  
NÓS



46 FAMÍLIAS

71 GNA DI SUF



process of revitalisation. This process of revitalisation is polarised between the recuperation of the central region in order to render it more attractive to the middle-classes on the one hand, and, on the other, the pressure for an inclusive environment where low income people can benefit from new housing initiatives, income-generation public programmes and jobs.

“Gentrification” and “struggle for housing” have become common expressions in the discourse of the art collectives involved in the Prestes Maia occupation. These collectives sought not only to make known the history and cultural initiatives of those who lived there (such as the 16 thousand-volume library created by one of the squatters) but to also question the region’s production of the physical, social and economic space.

The term “Arid Poetry Zone” has been used to describe how art collectives sought to contribute to the daily life of a place existing under the constant pressure of state violence and brutalisation. The aesthetic vocabulary created by the art collectives through initiatives such as urban interventions; performances; direct actions; *escraches*<sup>2</sup>; culture jamming (for example installations made with housing market advertising placards); and paste-ups on the walls of the Prestes Maia created symbolic weapons against the threat of evictions and interfered in the corporate media’s official discourse on the housing movement.<sup>3</sup>

The community formed around Prestes Maia, including dwellers, activists, art collectives and other collaborators was not only in dialogue with those who wished to evict the squatters but also had to deal with difficulties in striking agreements with the MSTC itself, often becoming confused with, or clashing with, the demands of a hierarchised movement. Furthermore artists had to be wary of projecting art works onto an extremely delicate social situation in a way which could serve simply to highlight their own production in the art world. Or worse still, in a way which would legitimate the use of cultural capitalism to link a civilised and paying audience to processes of urban revitalisation.

The creative *dissensus* which has emerged out of the housing struggle movement highlights the need to construct social spaces that allow artistic autonomy, critical thinking and differences in artistic strategy to emerge. An important lesson from the Prestes Maia occupation was the need to avoid both old strategies of representational political art and the mistake of relegating artists to providing a mere marketing campaign for the movement. Instead attempts were made to facilitate a continuing process of experiential education which allowed groups to work together without expropriation - opening up a dialogic interaction between artists, movements and communities. Art’s capacity for revolutionary transformation is only manifested by means of collective creation of daily life, in the language and space of the city.

Hope for a new life still soars for the 468 families who lived in the Prestes Maia occupation. Their stories remind me of something written by North-American historian and activist Howard Zinn: In

order not to lose heart, he tells us, it is necessary to envisage struggle as a long term transformation. We don’t need to participate in great heroic acts, small actions shared and taken up through further initiatives can multiply and modify the context from whence they came from, reaching people who are in other parts of Brazil, other parts of the world or even over there in Redfern. A revolutionary change is an infinite succession of surprises that move towards a more fair society.

André Mesquita is historian, activist and editor of *Rizoma* ([www.rizoma.net](http://www.rizoma.net)).

Translated by Gavin Adams.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> This and other movements take their name from their homeless condition prior to occupying a building: *sem-teto*, literally meaning “roofless”. For clarity’s and brevity’s sake this translation adopts the English term *squatters*.

<sup>2</sup> [Editor’s note –*escrache* is a strategy created by Argentine groups to reveal the torturers and collaborators with military regime. The Brazilian groups made an appropriation of this strategy using in different contexts with dwellers and the housing struggle movement.)

<sup>3</sup> For example, the massive banner “ZUMBI SOMOS NÓS” (We Are Zumbi), made by Frente 3 de Fevereiro and installed at the top of Prestes Maia building, which creates a direct connection to an urban *quilombo* on São Paulo downtown; the performances created by Catadores de Histórias and Tranca RUA; woodcuts with the phrase “INTEGRAÇÃO SEM POSSE X REINTEGRAÇÃO DE POSSE” (Integration Into Non-Ownership X Reinstatement Of Ownership), made by Coletivo Dragão da Gravura, the gentrification posters created by BijaRi or the poster “VIDA X PROPRIEDADE” (Life X Propriety), by Esqueleto Coletivo, in order to emphasize the dichotomies between social inequality and economic interests; the appropriation and subversion of real estate advertising street placards, such as barricades made by the Elefante, which joined together formed the word “DIGNIDADE” (Dignity), an anti-gentrification/real estate speculation exhibition with artistic interventions and installations made with these placards, SPLAC, promoted by Experiência Imersiva Ambiental, and the placard with the phrase “ZONA DE POESIA ÁRIDA” (Zone of Arid Poetry), by Cia. Cachorra, installed on front of Prestes Maia occupation. Used as tactical images and linguistic suggestions, these conceptual interventions alerted the media and public opinion about the resistance and the social situation of the families living in popular occupations in São Paulo downtown

# Ship of Fools

MIKLÓS ERHARDT AND LITTLE WARSAW



Video still, Ship of Fools, Miklós Erhardt and Little Warsaw, 2007

**T**he ex-Peterlini building in Rovereto, Italy, was squatted by an anarchist group in 2002. They were removed instantly by the city authorities through a large scale mobilization of Police Special Units. In 2008, Manifesta 7 (the European Biennial for Contemporary Art) accepted the offer of the city authorities and occupied the same building as one of its exhibition venues. Within the framework of this exhibition Miklós Erhardt and Little Warsaw attempted to revisit the story of the squat in their artwork in the ex-Peterlini building - to the opposition of the anarchists. In the resulting negotiation the question at stake was how to avoid recuperation of a direct action while at the same time realising an artistic representation?

Below is the unedited transcript of a conversation between Miklós Erhardt, Little Warsaw and members of the anarchist group. The meeting took place in the Ship of Fools, a club operated by anarchists, in March 2008. Speakers from the anarchist group are marked by numbers; 'A' stands for the artists.

A: Buona sera, thank you for having time for us. We came from Budapest, invited by Manifesta 7. Within Manifesta there will be various exhibitions and, as you might know already, one of them will be hosted in the ex-Peterlini building. At our first visit we came to the story of the building, namely that it has been contested ever since you first squatted it, as a place that the owner wasn't using for anything but at the same time they were more than reluctant to let you use it for public purposes. It's basically a building that first you occupied, and now, six years later, Manifesta will occupy. We got interested in this story

and decided to work with it. We have been planning a video to be shot in Budapest with a group of young local anarchists who had made a similarly short lived, I would say symbolic squatting a couple of years ago. We would like to bring your story to Budapest and create a kind of a virtual dialogue between the two realities, in the framework of a re-enactment. The whole thing is still quite flexible. What we have been doing so far was to read all the newspapers of the time and make interviews with people who were involved in the events in 2002, mostly from the side of the City Council and also other figures who tried to mediate between you and the police - and now we are here to speak with the protagonists. We would like to ask you to share your thoughts, suggestions or criticisms about this idea with us, and also to provide some details of what the day of the first occupation of the building was like from "inside", as obviously this is something we couldn't read in the newspapers.

1: I don't know... I'd start with this consideration: this was the first in a series of squats - we have squatted 4 or 5 times and we got always evacuated. The longest one persisted for one and a half months. So, it was a series of squats. Therefore... I don't know... an artistic initiative made in the very place where we had gotten evacuated from, in a place that had been wasted for years and has been empty since we got kicked out - and, what's more, the whole thing is being financed by the very people who had evacuated us... well, it's a bit paradoxical.

A: But it's something we initiated, not those people...

1. Alright. Let's discuss it. In my opinion, unless you manage to give this initiative some kind of a break or rupture it will become what we call a recuperation, that is a lived experience first gets repressed by the

dominant power then it gets and neutralised in the form of an artistic product. So, if you want us to remain in this framework... and, as you said, you had made interviews with those people who had kicked us out, and with the “loyal” spectators of the event, so in the end we would only be one voice in this choir of agents and oppressors...

A: We have asked them in order to gain some information, to have more points of view of the situation we have been researching. It's not decided in what way we will use it, in case we will use it at all.

1: But what exactly are you thinking of?

2: They want to re-root, to implement our experience into a Hungarian experience...

1: And in the end, to project this film in ex-Peterlini.

2: There were other artists, too, who came to us because they were interested in the movements of the region. And I tried to make them understand that for someone who is putting everything at risk – like us with that squatting –, the fact to see ourselves transformed into something representational, and, on top of it, in the very place from where the harsh repression towards us has been launched... First they kick us out than they put us in... in a...

1: in a showcase.

2: Yes, in a showcase, together with other folkloristic elements of the town. So, the point is: either this thing, through art, becomes effectively an appropriation of the place... or it becomes a fairytale... I don't know to imagine that I go there to watch my story of being evacuated... And even if it happened years ago, there are still people who are under investigation for the subversion of the democratic order – just because of a squat! – running the risk of years in prison. There are people who are under special surveillance, others are in prison because of the squats and their engagement in the fights – it's not really a game for them, you know what I mean. We can tell you how it was, what was our motivation to enter, what was the spirit of it, and what it will be (as we will squat again) – but not in order to see us transformed into an artwork.

3: Because it would be anyway the same people to speak about it who had spoken about it in the newspapers.

2: Then, if we had managed to stay longer in there we would have also organised so called “artistic” programs – but in our way. That is, concerts and exhibitions, but in spontaneous dispersal. What Manifesta is saying is this: Okay, let's take away all the spontaneity and exhibit something that fits us because it stays within the limits we have established. But art with that limitation doesn't have anything to do with us.

4: My reaction to your proposal is that we both have a totally different approaches to this issue. You are proposing a video about squatting, but squatting for me is first of all a direct action and as such it expresses its content. As soon as it is transformed into a testimony, it loses its original values. I think the right way to propose it again would be a new direct action.

A: Well, in the end it will be a product so it will necessarily become recuperated: I can't deny that. But this transformation will be reflexive. It won't just become a theatre performance with actors and written dialogues. We would like to throw your experiences into another situation in which it should evolve. We don't intend to make a rigid monument of your direct action.

1: We should make some things clear. Your idea is to make a video. A video is not recuperation in itself. We make videos ourselves, videos that speak about the experience of the fight and are projected in another context of the fight. These videos are artifacts themselves in a way, as they are something technical. But they are in dialogue with a living situation provided by the fight. So, if the idea is to make a video, to me personally it can even be interesting to hear about the experiences of squatters in Budapest, it can even instruct me in something concerning our own fight or the fight of others I know. Another thing is an art event organized in ex-Peterlini...

A: You are now saying the same thing as the curator. Be calm, it seems the video cannot be projected in ex-Peterlini

2: See, they don't want to let them project it there because of our “ghosts”...

1: But if it was possible to imagine a certain way to break – with our help, if you wish – the artistic representation in ex-Peterlini... (laughter) Why not? It would already be much more interesting.

A: You are free to do it. You can also consider it as another occasion to bring up the topic...

5: But it would just be speaking about it in a harmless way.

4: It can be interesting to speak about it again, but I think we would squat another place if we want to speak about it. Not just to speak about the past, about all these evacuations...

3: And not to speak about it within an initiative of the City Council.

2: I'm more interested in it if it becomes something by which this piece of the past can come back to bite again in reality. Then we could do it.

A: Tons of people of all around the world will come to visit Manifesta and they cannot all know the realities of this place.

1: Anyway, to speak about a past occupation at Manifesta is rather useless. It would be much more important to speak about the current situation. Not about things of 5 years ago but about these giant projects that most of the people don't know about because there's a big silence around questions of technology. The problem of public spaces in town is only one of the problems. There is the High Speed Train that they are planning to build, which will have enormous environmental and social costs to pay; the military base in Mastarello; the centers of biotechnology and nanotechnology. These agendas are really frightening.

A: Manifesta, even without our collaboration, will provide the necessary attention to speak about these things, if you decide so.

1: When is it? (laughter)... I don't know if it's possible to bring up all these things at Manifesta without providing material for easy recuperation within the art context, as art commodity. That would really be disgusting.

A: Well, you are putting a quite big burden on our shoulders...

1: You started it. (laughter)

A: Another thing: when I was reading the articles of the time it seemed clear that you hadn't managed to communicate your intentions to the larger public ...

1: It's a bit difficult with all those policemen dragging you out on your ass ... (laughter)

A: I can see the point...

1: But afterwards we formulated and distributed some flyers which told the story of the squatting and we shared also some thoughts on the city.

A: I remember you announced a general assembly of the district for the following day, which obviously didn't happen.

5: We had other occupations that took for more than a month and there we had more chance for communication.

3: Our occupations were quite different both as far as the duration and our capacity to open up towards the city is concerned. The first one remained a bit closed on itself, for various reasons.

1: You know, our criticism is not that everything that becomes a product is to be thrown away, because even a book is a product. It is the context and way it circulates that counts.

A: I understand very well what you are saying but sincerely, in this project there will always be a certain level of instrumentalisation. Your instrumentalisation, that is. What we wanted was to avoid this trap of "biennialism" which consists of, from the point of view of the artists, getting parachuted into a city to engage with the local issues then create their – necessarily superficial – response to them. So, to avoid this, we thought of this little *détournement*: to bring this piece of reality back to a context we know, our own context, and then maybe when it is brought back, it can have at least an informative value. We didn't really have in mind a revolutionary value.

1: But even if we stay on the informational level, I think it would be much more chance for a rupture if we spoke about other things, other issues because the danger of recuperation would be much lower. Because – but it's really striking – to make whatever kind of artistic initiative on a squat, in that very place that had been occupied, evacuated then restructured in order to accommodate an artistic event organised by the same people who are responsible for the evacuation – well, there you don't have a way of

escape. There you are already nicely packaged. And to be packaged in advance is not something we are happy about. But if there's something, a banner or whatever, or another video that redirects the question of responsibility to those who organised it, that might be different.

4: The reason to squat was not only squatting in itself but to launch other fights from within that place. The place served not only for an "anarchist-container" but a place for organising, among other things, the fight against the High Speed Train.

A: Don't you think that the chance for you to initiate this discourse will be open also if we did our film? So that it doesn't need to be only the film but other actions can be linked to it, things you decide on your own.

1: Let's see it, hypothetically: we gate-crash the event, roll out a banner – that's possible. But it's even better if the situation is somehow prepared by someone from the ranks of the artists, in a way no one expects it. Here you have to evaluate as after an intervention like this I'm not sure they will be happy to invite you again for such an event... (laughter)

A: Well, this system is even more sophisticated, and even such a thing is easy to recuperate, believe me.

1: Sure. But still, there are gestures that are more annoying for them than other gestures.

A: These things are decided in concrete. The approach that you mention, that is, that making a documentary of something that had happened years ago, to make an artistic response of the kind, would be easily acceptable for an organisation like this, and we agree with you: that wouldn't make sense. There, to bite into reality is almost impossible. But what we feel now, as we are proceeding, is that there's a growing animosity from the part of the organisation...

2: Yes, we are a bit of a pain in the ass...

A: Today I was thinking of this song that I have never heard anyway, with this line, "Time is of the philosophers", the one you were singing...

1: Did you read of it in the papers?

A: I've been reading the papers for three days now...

2: Then you know more than we do... (laughter)

A: Could you sing it now?

(All): No. (big laughter)

1: It is an old anarchist song from the end of the nineteenth century.

2: We were singing it most of all because we were deadly afraid.

1: It was a means to overcome the tension.

A: Shortly after Genoa you had a good reason to be afraid.

4: Also because it was a new scenario for the city so we couldn't be sure what their reaction would be. We had decided not to make active resistance. We only barricaded ourselves and we thought of it as a good means just to stay firm and sing which might catch the policemen unprepared. And in fact, it happened like that, they weren't very aggressive as they had heard us singing from the outside before they broke in.

A: You don't seem to apply very often these "aesthetic" tactics so characteristic of the counter-globalisation movement. Even your graffiti in the town are more like long sentences, using a very explicit language.

1: We also make use of *détournement*, like for example when we present our fake candidates at the elections – but this is to be distinguished from creating pure moments of media spectacle, like in Genoa. The attention of the media creates easily the illusions as far as your real power is concerned. For example, in Val di Susa where the construction of the High Speed Train was supposed to start, no media entered until recently, still, there was the fight going on which succeeded in blocking the construction.

A: In those days the mass media, the local TV and the press spoke a lot of you...

1: Of me? (laughter) But that doesn't have anything to do with the real situation. That's just part of the folklorisation. The squatting and the direct action are collective methods. It's not about me or her or him. We don't even have any spokesperson.

1: All right, then. We are sorry but we have other things to discuss tonight. So that's what we can offer – you have to assess it. Hope it was clear: if there's a chance to speak about certain things, I would evaluate the chance to collaborate. With the criteria outlined so far.



Video still, *Ship of Fools*, Miklós Erhardt and Little Warsaw, 2007



Miklós Erhardt works in the overlaps between social, political and artistic fields. He has worked in the artistic collaboration Big Hope as well as making art individually and teaching, publishing and participating in various workshops. His recent shows include De Appel, Ludwig Museum-Budapest, Apex Art Gallery, Galerija Skc-Belgrade and Wiener Secession. Little Warsaw is the collective name for artists András Gálik and Bálint Havas as an umbrella unit for their collaborative activities. Little Warsaw have exhibited at the Venice Biennial, the Berlin Biennial, Stedelijk Museum, GFZK Leipzig and Apex Art Gallery.

# A “GREEN” ISOLA FOR THE RICH: Arts and communities against Eco-Gentrification in Milan, Italy.

MARA FERRERI, ALBERTO PESAVENTO AND BERT THEIS

**I**sola (island) is the name of a neighbourhood in Milan, situated behind the Garibaldi railway station, which for a long time remained isolated between the railroad tracks and canals, and is still today connected to (or separated from) the city by two bridges – hence the name “island”. In the past Isola had gone through many incarnations: a nest of Lombard shop-owners and workers; a haven in the 20s for small-time criminals and bandits (boasting at times a warning to policemen not to enter); an irreducible anti-fascist and partisan community; a springboard for committees fighting demolition plans; and an incubator of squats and occupations in the 90s.

Isola’s social and urban singularities (a heterogeneous population characterised by solidarity, in an area of low and irregular developments) have over the past two decades been at risk of erasure, a slow and yet perceivable process aimed at flattening the neighbourhood to the residential and fashion districts’ standards, and cramming it with privileged inhabitants and night-life tourism.

Comitato I Mille, Forum Isola, Office for Urban Transformation and Isola Art Center are the latest manifestations of a radical discontent, proposing a series of effective and active alternatives to the institutional abandonment that has left the neighbourhood at the mercy of increasingly seductive communicational and co-optive logics. In the case of Isola these logics characterised a supposedly participatory planning aiming at gaining support from the inhabitants for projects inconsistent with the urban context, if not the outright result of urban speculation.

During these conflictive developments an “urban void”, constituted by a semi-abandoned factory and two surrounding vacant lots, was recuperated by the neighbourhood associations and turned into a public park. The contemporary art projects at Isola started in 2001 with actions and events centred on this space. In 2003 the 1500 square metres of the

upper floor of the former factory called *Stecca degli artigiani* were squatted in order to create an Art and Community Centre open to the neighbourhood. The challenge set for the centre and its participants was to avoid what nearly always happens when museums, art centres, galleries or public art projects are introduced in a working class neighbourhood: they become instruments of gentrification. Out of this awareness the centre began to actively work against gentrification by linking the art projects to the movement of opposition to the urban plans as well as to the neighbourhood’s elaboration of counter-proposals: being not only “site specific”, but also “fight specific”.

These challenges were met by creating and maintaining a close connection between the needs and desires of the local inhabitants and the practice of the centre. Rather than aiming at attracting “the art crowd” and its usual urban hype (galleries moving in, new restaurants and bars, old warehouses turned into lofts etc), the activities of the centre were directed at the people who live in the area and at their interests. Among them, that of maintaining the green areas and of turning the abandoned factory into a centre for everyone, and not just an exhibition space following some abstract logic removed from everyday life.

In April 2007 the city council and the Texan multinational real estate development agency Hines have cleared the *Stecca*, evicting Isola Art Centre, the craftspeople and the associations, ahead of the demolition of the building. The operation was aimed at delivering the *Stecca* and the parks to the corporation, so as to develop new buildings with a total volume of over 90, 000 cubic meters.

The latest plan for the area, signed by Boeri Studio, involves underground parking lots, luxury dwellings and two tree-covered towers, called a “vertical forest”, in place of the present park, added to the construction of a 30,000 cubic metre building with parking lots, offices and a shopping mall to be built by the Italian Ligresti group.<sup>1</sup>



Forum Isola organizes public picnics in the main square of the district to protest against the privatization and closure of the neighbourhood's public parks.



The whole package was presented to the media under the label “eco-district”, in order to ensure public consensus for the elimination of the public space. Beside Boeri, which is also coordinating the architectural plans for hosting the next G8 summit on the Sardinian island La Maddalena, two American architects have been called to build on the parks: Mc Dowel for a so-called eco-sustainable office building and Lagrange from Chicago for luxury dwellings.<sup>2</sup>

The whole project could be defined as “eco-gentrification”<sup>3</sup>, an even more insidious form of top-down urban development capable of co-opting the desires and demands of the inhabitants and translating them into fashionable slogans that obscure the devastating impact they have on the less privileged inhabitants of these areas. This impact has been effectively summed up by Saskia Sassen’s comment “Too much dislocation, too much power pushing the weakest ones out!”<sup>4</sup>

Indeed the first people that were evicted from the district were the craftspeople who lost their workshops in the *Stecca* and several homeless people who lived in the building. But things will only get worse: there will be an economic impact on the local network of small shopkeepers who will have to face competition from a huge shopping mall. And there will be a social impact caused by the arrival in the neighbourhood of a whole new class of wealthy residents, attracted by the construction of the luxury apartments, which will change dramatically the nature of the neighbourhood.

The real estate development agencies and the right wing city council hoped to silence the opposition by destroying the factory building and by fencing off the green areas. But eight years of a common fight for public space have created a strong community. Isola Art Centre continues to organise shows, lectures and meetings in squares and several other public and private venues across the district. The centre is also using the shutters of many district’s shops as exhibition space and is looking for new alternative sites for its community activities in the neighbourhood. The result is an art centre without a specific building.

In January 2009 the court stopped the construction of Ligresti’s mall for the second time. Soon other courts will have to pass judgement on several other legal actions, which could virtually bring to an end the whole development of the Garibaldi-Repubblica area. So the end of the dispute is far from settled.



Mara Ferreri is researcher, living and working between London and Milan. She is interested in politics of space, contemporary art practices and their potential for social change. Alberto Pesavento is a researcher and writer, living and working in the Isola district, Milan and is an active member of the Isola Art Centre, and OUT-Office for Urban Transformation. Bert Theis is an artist, living and working in the Isola district, Milan and in Luxembourg. He has participated to numerous art biennials and international shows since 1995, working mostly in public spaces and is Co-founder of the Isola Art Center, Milan, and OUT-Office for Urban Transformation, 2002. [www.isolartcenter.org](http://www.isolartcenter.org).

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Salvatore Ligresti was in jail in 1992 for corruption. He is still the most important real estate promoter in Milan and he is currently involved in nearly all the building projects for the international Expo 2015 in Milan.

<sup>2</sup> From Lucien Lagrange official website, he presents himself as the architect for “the filthy rich”, see <http://www.lucienlagrange.com>

<sup>3</sup> Expression coined by Vasif Kortun.

<sup>4</sup> Reply to a question regarding the new urban plans for the Isola, interview to Saskia Sassen on the Italian national newspaper La Repubblica, 7<sup>th</sup> July 2007.

# Everything Was Planned Before You Got There

## TEMPORARY SERVICES

**I**nequality is a structural component of every society. Everywhere you find people, you will find some who benefit from the way things are, and some whose concerns are rejected, neglected or ignored because of the same things. This lack of democratic participation can be traced to similar structural flaws. Problems with larger concerns like governments or city planning are often obfuscated by cumbersome, internecine structures that make participation difficult or impossible. Mitigating and addressing inequality can be frustrating and take decades to resolve.

Temporary Services has realised two projects that address city planning and governance that is created without equal input from all the constituents who are affected. We think that it is important to try to find creative ways to address situations where large numbers of people (in these cases, residents of two particular neighbourhoods in Chicago) have been excluded from critical decisions about how their city spaces work.

In 2000, we realised our first group public project called Public Sculpture Opinion Poll. We were all living on Chicago's near west side. One day we were driving and noticed a new sculpture had appeared, seemingly from out of the vapors, in the middle of a traffic triangle at a busy intersection. Our initial response was one of anger and resignation to the typical ways in which the political democratic machine works in Chicago, and also general dismay at the sculpture that was picked. We talked about replying to the aggressive gesture of the sculpture being placed there with an equally violent reply of dismantling or defacement. We realised, however, that we didn't have all the facts at hand just yet. Our violent urges quickly subsided. After some discussion, we decided that it was important not to repeat the situation that the city had created by placing the sculpture there and instead deal with the powerful symbolism (the power of money over democracy, the power of gentrification, etc.) that the sculpture summoned into existence. We were also curious what kind of meaning others who lived by and passed through the intersection extracted from the sculpture's placement.

We decided to find out more about this sculpture and investigate the process by which it was purchased and installed. Several calls were made to the city of Chicago's Department of Cultural Affairs. Eventually we found an employee who could confirm the authorship of the sculpture, for it was about a year before a name-plate identifying who made the work was added to the site. We asked a colleague who is a gardener to assess the value of the plants and landscaping. We also discovered that a group of developers posing as a community group had donated the sculpture, which was given to them by a gallery (Paul Klein Gallery) and an artist.

The sculpture is by Josh Garber and is titled "Episodic". It is a construction of rusting green city light poles that were cut up and welded together in interlocking loops. The poles were cut at varying angles and widths and fit back together. Landscaping around the work was done at the time the sculpture was installed. The poles have since been repainted light blue – a clear effort to conceal the rust.

Our response was to put clipboards on all four corners of the intersection. Each clipboard had images on the bottom – three views of the sculpture so it was completely clear what we were addressing – and a stack of forms bearing two questions: "What do you think of this sculpture?" and, "Why do you think it was placed in the neighbourhood?" At the bottom of the clipboard we stated: "Thank you for your feedback. Your responses may be published in a booklet that will be given to the City's Department of Public Art." For a period of approximately one month, we collected the responses, replaced the forms, pens, and sometimes stolen clip boards on a daily basis. Approximately 125 completed forms were collected over the duration of the project.

The replies ranged from being supportive of the sculpture, to demanding its immediate removal, as well as reflections on the politics that put it there, an awareness of how the sculpture's appearance related to the gentrification of the area, formal analyses by young children, and the expected assortment of graffiti, gang signs and other scribbles that were unrelated to the questions we asked.

Josh Garber's *Episodic*  
Image by Temporary Services



After collecting ample replies we presented them in multiple exhibitions, published them in a booklet and on our website, and confronted the city about this sculpture during a panel discussion at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. The city's then Director of Public Art, Mike Lash, said a community group donated the sculpture. This was not true. Lash said the city paid no money for it. Technically this is true, but when considering tax breaks, or revenue that can't be collected from the donors through taxes, then this is also not true. Nine years later, the sculpture remains and we remain annoyed by its presence as we pass it on the way to our storage space and post office box.

We undertook a similar project in 2006 with the keyholders (a term for those who maintain the space) of Mess Hall, an experimental cultural centre we co-founded in 2003 in the Rogers Park neighbourhood of Chicago. Emboldened by Homeland Security funding and the climate of fear during the Bush years, The City of Chicago put a collection of surveillance cameras on street corners all around the city and networked them to other private and public cameras in a central command center. These weren't typical closed-circuit television cameras. They were accompanied by flashing blue lights and have an ominous presence wherever they are placed. One was put at an intersection fifty feet away from Mess Hall. We were upset by this – and the lack of public discussion. Mess Hall also worried about the implications of the police spreading its control in this way. We decided to create a discussion about it in the window of our storefront.

We made a large banner with an image of the camera and asked a simple question of passersby: "What do you think about having a surveillance camera in your neighbourhood?" We had sheets of paper with the image and question on them available for people to take from an envelope mounted on the door. People passed their completed responses through our mail slot and we posted the replies in the window and inside the space when there was no longer room in the window. In this situation, people took the sheets home and typed lengthy replies. The responses were much more detailed than those we received about

the public sculpture. There was again a variety of positive and negative responses to both the idea of surveillance cameras and to the particular camera in the Mess Hall neighbourhood. Some people pointed out that the crime, such as drug dealing, simply moved just out of the reach of the camera. Others said that the camera's presence gave them a sense of security and relief.

It was obvious from the length of many of the responses that the opportunity to express opinions was generally taken more seriously than in the original Public Sculpture Opinion Poll. There were very few off-topic or joke responses. In addition to being posted at Mess Hall, the replies were exhibited at Polvo, a gallery in Chicago's Pilsen neighbourhood which has been similarly affected by the widespread use of surveillance cameras. Likewise, the project was presented at the Wysing Art Centre in the United Kingdom where police surveillance is a similarly contested issue. The replies currently reside in Mess Hall's archives at the storefront.

These projects are ways of inserting public commentary, generating discussion, and potentially creating a direct democratic process in situations where the infrastructure for such feedback and exchange doesn't exist. In many cases, any possibility of feedback or dialogue is actively suppressed through policy, de facto governance, or both. Both projects were extremely inexpensive to produce and maintain, consisting only of one or more signs, photocopied forms, cheap pens and a modest amount of effort to collect the replies. We believe that experiments and activities such as these are necessary in city spaces, and hope to encourage others to realize localised versions in their own cities.

- Note: The complete *Public Sculpture Opinion Poll* replies can be read online: <http://www.temporaryservices.org/psop.html>

# There goes Ballesta street?

ANA MÉNDEZ DE ANDÉS

In April 2008 an unusual wave of “squatting” hit the streets of Madrid. “creative squatters”, displaying the traditional icons of the squat movement, moved into premises around Ballesta street occupying two former brothels, one ex-dry cleaning shop, a butchery and other commercial spaces in one of the sleaziest corners of Madrid. The campaign, which was actually led by a private company, has renamed the area triBall - ‘tri/ángulo Ball/esta’- after the triangle formed by the streets Gran Vía (an upmarket stylish area), Fuencarral (a cool and trendy area) and Corredera Baja (a place for bars and restaurants), around the infamous Ballesta (red light district) of Madrid. triBall is owned by a real estate company which has bought some 50 business premises in that triangle and has also acquired a few apartment buildings in the surrounding area. Along with three marketing, communication and PR companies and with the acquiescence of the City Council they are leading an “urban surgery operation” that will help “clean a black hole” of the city.

To the aggravation of the genuine squatter scene the area used to be the site of the squatted social centre Casa Popular de Maravillas, which lasted only three months. The centre’s eviction provoked a series of riots back in 1997. Moreover it is 200m away from El Patio Maravillas<sup>1</sup> a metropolitan squatted social centre which opened more than a year and a half ago, and is now under threat of eviction<sup>2</sup>. Even if the wave of “creative squatting” was genuine, by these odds, it should have produced more transient outcomes.

To the dismay of artists triBall’s cultural program opened with a fashion show (“working the street ... with style”) and included several themed street markets, an ice rink replete with Christmas decorations and art exhibitions inside commercial. With creative programs such as these it is not easy to discern whether the

promoters of triBall are eager followers of Richard Florida (author of *The Rise of the Creative Class*)<sup>3</sup> who urges the creation of environments that will attract “cool creative people” or are trying to implement an uncritical small-time version of what Jamie Peck calls “cappuccino urban politics, with plenty of froth”.<sup>4</sup>

While triBall launched promotional videos portraying it as a green triangular island of trendy fashion, family values, art and ecology “without losing that pinch of history and tradition”, the local financial newspaper headline depicted a harsher, and more accurate, description of the situation: “triBall buys a neighbourhood”<sup>5</sup>. If the main issue around property and ownership of “common space” in urban regeneration processes, is as Elisabeth Blackmar explains<sup>6</sup>, the question of who has the right to exclude others from the uses and benefits of resources, then triBall has “de facto” privatised a whole chunk of Madrid. This is a move that follows a colonisation tactic (Separation, Seclusion and Surveillance)<sup>7</sup> by demarcating an area with specific limits which, furthermore, will be associated with a (corporate) image that only they control; arrogating to itself the right to decide who can or cannot run a business in the Ballesta street area and forcing an increase in police control including the first comprehensive implementation of CCTV cameras in the streets of Madrid<sup>8</sup>.

Following Neil Smith’s categorisation of gentrification as a succession of consecutive waves, (see 16beaver’s article p60), triBall would be part of a fourth one - *instant gentrification* - where a private initiative instigates and dominates the process by acquiring massive amounts of urban territory, thereby being able to manage time lines, make programmatic decisions and introduce public control mechanisms. In this phase, cultural producers are endured only if they are needed for the process to be successful.



**GENTRIFICACIÓN: Proceso de rehabilitación y/o mejora de una zona urbana deteriorada REALIZADO POR LA CLASE MEDIA EMERGENTE con fines especulativos INMOBILIARIOS resultando generalmente en la expulsión de la población de renta baja.**



### triBall/anti-triBall

One of the most interesting moments of the conflict produced by triBall has been the actions launched by the *Todo por la Praxis (Amplifying Producer Laboratory)* <sup>9</sup> whose anti-triball campaign was set up by artists and designers as a response to the “marketing and publicity campaign that legitimizes [triBall] activity”. *Todo por la Praxis* created a blog and launched “45 Activist Minds”, an anti-triBall competition calling for posters to be glued in the streets appropriated by triBall. Later, when anti-triballists faced difficulties with cleaning teams and police, they launched a range of stickers designed by Santiago Sierra. Anti-triBall activists also began collaborating with Hetaira (a sex-worker collective) whose office had to move out of Ballesta Street after triBall bought the one they were using. They organised an alternative cat-walk (Lumi Fashion 08) under the motto: “*We are a neighbourhood, more than 35,349 ways to inhabit it, much more than a brand.*”

Social issues, such as sex-work, drugs, graffiti and surveillance have been the subject of two other interventions. In Autumn 2007 (after the first urban rehabilitation of a square that pushed the drug addicts and drug dealers to the Ballesta street area) the multi-disciplinary collective Left Hand Rotation <sup>10</sup> hung posters of well known films related to drugs, sex-work, and surveillance in the windows of a derelict cinema.

Almost at the same time, *fem09 - Festival Madrid Edition Nuevos Creativos* placed containers in the very same square with an exhibition under the timely theme of *The Art of Terror* “to manifest the excess of tension generated with the instauration of ever more complex mechanisms around safety, surveillance, boundaries, displacements and controls”.

### Canalla branding

*Canalla* is a difficult term to translate from Spanish, especially when applied to a place. It could be considered a mix of dodgy, rogue, low life and edgy... but cool. With most of the sleazy bars, night-clubs and brothels now closed (and the dark side of Ballesta’s past totally absent from the official storyline of triBall) it’s ‘canalla’ atmosphere is still covertly clung to by triBall to redeem the development from being “just another commercial area” and link it, in the popular imaginary, to an artistic and bohemian character.

While the private and public urban regeneration discourse advocates the eradication – or simply transfer - of the sex workers from Ballesta street (hoping drug users and dealers will leave with them) one might ask what else is being sold, with perhaps a more ambiguous reward? What did the “creative squatters” expect to get when they worked for free, having their five weeks of “opportunity” to achieve a return before being replaced by wealthier occupants? Which kind of capital is generated by the street artists who exhibit their work or decorate the façades as part of a project backed up by a local government which otherwise thinks graffiti is a social curse to eliminate? Which capital is generated by the architect <sup>11</sup> who exhibits his graphic work in a gallery in triBall and also presents his projects (with, amongst others, Teddy Cruz) in the ‘Urban Buddy Scheme’ organised by Madrid Abierto? Or for the ‘political minded’ curators who articulated a discourse against social control to be placed in the very same place that was subjected to one of the worst public surveillance schemes known in Madrid? Personal satisfaction, public representation, a sense of security and social recognition might be strong incentives in the immaterial production system we live in, but will – especially in the face of the upcoming crisis - hardly pay the bills.



## **Soho or SoHo?**

triBall developers have expressed their wish to create “Madrid’s own Soho”, at other times it was to be Madrid’s NoLita, Madrid’s le Marais, the Latin Quarter, Notting Hill, TriBeCa, Hells’s Kitchen or Carnaby Street. It doesn’t really matter: anything goes, as long as it involves an urban regeneration with the prospective of high revenues. triBall promoters and apologists have provided a good set of examples of culture-led urban regeneration processes, like an index of gentrification practices where the cultural assets serve as the motive and excuse for structural changes in the city’s social and economic composition.

But maybe the mix of Soho and SoHo is not so absurd. London Soho, the former and still resistant area of sex-related industries now full of bars and clubs and an important centre of the gay scene, and New York SoHo where the artist-driven regeneration coined the “loft living” concept<sup>12</sup>, together seem to represent the situation of the Ballesta street quite well.

In the general account of urban centres and their Disneyfication processes, this might seem like yet another story of a lost battle against the forces of investment capital, yet another lively and thriving neighbourhood being turned into a mock bobo’s paradise.<sup>13</sup> But the situation is far from being so definitive: Hetaira has challenged the implementation of CCTV cameras in “their” street, and they proclaim that it will not be so easy to push them out; anti-triBall cultural producers have proved that creativity is on their side and they can make more interesting actions while summoning better artists; the local real estate market and retail business are not doing well due to the global crisis; Malasaña-Maravillas locals are resisting the triBall attempt to reduce them to brand; even El Patio Maravillas, the ‘true’ Malasaña squat, might stay where it is, or in the worst case will find a new location. The story is not finished here, not yet.



Ana Méndez de Andés is a Spanish architect and urban planner who has worked in landscape projects in Amsterdam, London and Madrid – under the name of malashierbas. Since 2004 she has taken part in areaciega, collective research on public spaces [www.areaciega.net] initially funded by arteleku, and later joined the Observatorio Metropolitano [www.observatoriometropolitano.org], cluster of militant micro-investigations about Madrid metropolitan area and other urban issues. English translation by Jaya Klara Brekke.



#### ENDNOTES

1 El Patio Maravillas has held, in its 20 months of life, different workshops, discussions, art performances, the 2009 Madrid Social Forum, and runs regular language classes, a Social rights Office (ODS), a hacklab, bike shop and an urban allotment (on the roof) <http://www.patiomaravillas.net/> It has also been involved in the anti-triball campaign, and recently organized a round table about 'Social centres, cultural production and social expropriation', at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, now under the direction of Manuel Borja-Vilal.

2 As of February 2009

3 Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class*. Basic Books, New York 2002

4 "Florida is not asking for a blank check for new government programs, for major concessions to be made to the non-creative under-classes, nor even for regulatory transformation. His calls for creative empowerment can be met in relatively painless ways — by manipulating street-level façades, while gently lubricating the gentrification processes. This, critics justly complain, is cappuccino urban politics, with plenty of froth." Jamie Peck, *Struggling with the Creative Class*, International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, Volume 29.4 December 2005 pp. 740–770

5 "Triball 'compra' un barrio en Madrid" in *CincoDias* 14/01/2008 [http://www.cincodias.com/articulo/empresas/Triball-compra-barrio-Madrid/20080114cdscdiemp\\_9/cdsemp/](http://www.cincodias.com/articulo/empresas/Triball-compra-barrio-Madrid/20080114cdscdiemp_9/cdsemp/)

6 Elisabeth Blackmar, "Appropriating 'the Commons': The Tragedy of Property Rights Discourse" in *The Politics of Public Space*, edited by Setha Low and Neil Smith. Routledge, New York 2006

7 Sharon Rotbard, "Wall and Tower (Homa Umigdal) The Mold of Israeli Architecture", in *A civilian Occupation: The Politics of Israeli Architecture ("The banned catalogue")*, edited by Rafi Segal and Eyal Weizman.

8 Until January 2008, Madrid had only 20 CCTV cameras in the whole city, all of them around one specific tourist point: the Plaza Mayor. The implementation of 31 new cameras in the area of Montera and Ballesta streets was taken under pressure from business and local associations, publicly as a measure against sex-workers and their clients — it seems necessary here to clarify that, in Spain, sex-work, unlike pimping, is not an illegal activity — and had to get the approval of Madrid High Court of Justice. <http://www.colectivohetaira.org/recurso100608.html>

9 Todo por la Praxis defines itself as an Amplifying Producer Laboratory of cultural resistance aesthetic projects. A laboratory that offers tools for the social intervention in the urban public space, always with the aim to create a activist and oppositional Praxis. <http://antitriball.wordpress.com/todo-por-la-praxis/> <http://www.madridabierto.com/es/intervenciones-artisticas/2008/todo-por-la-praxis.html>

10 <http://www.lefthandrotation.com/proyectos/cinesluna/index.htm>

11 <http://www.luisurculo.com/blog/>

12 Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change*. Rutgers University Press, New York 1990

13 David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise: The Upper Class and How They Got There*. Simon and Schuster, New York 2000

# Smash the Ghetto

DEMOCRACIA

El Salobral was one of Europe's largest shanty towns located on the southern outskirts of Madrid. In March 2007, the Madrid City Council and the Regional Government decided that the slum would be demolished and its inhabitants rehoused. The Spanish art collective Democracia intervened in this process erecting bleachers for people to sit on and watch the ensuing destruction. Their intervention explored the responsibilities, and culpability, of civil society in the fate of the ghetto.



**W**hen we think about utopia we imagine that at least some of its aspects have the possibility of being realised in the present day. Nowadays, however, “no spectre haunts Europe” – we imagine only the ruins of a utopia which has been substituted, a long time ago, by pragmatism. Social democracy has replaced revolution, the welfare state class struggle - in short, comfort has become the main ideology of our time.

But even this “diminished utopia”, which nowadays appears to be the brightest of the possible options, is under threat by neo-liberal trends. In spite of its contradictions, of its clientelism and welfarism, a residual support for human rights and for basic dignity is maintained, since in other social models inequality is not only a fact but also a “right”. The welfare state is based on the principle of equality and aims to achieve an increase in the quality of life of all its citizens. The difference this has in comparison with other neo-liberal models is that these are

premised on the idea that intervention is a threat against freedom and that public expenditure on social services is a waste of resources.

The economic paradigm has shifted from a productive to a consumption society. In the productive society, the unemployed may find themselves temporarily outside of society's structure, but their position remains unquestionable, since the destiny of the unemployed (the reserve workforce army) is to be called up for active service again. In the consumptive society, however, the unsuccessful, incomplete or frustrated consumers are thrown out of the game of consumption altogether, they are now superfluous - no longer needed. While the prefix “un”, in “unemployment” suggests a deviation from the norm, the concept of “superfluity” no longer evoke this normative comparison. “Superfluity” shares semantic meanings with “rejected persons or things”, “waste”, “rubbish” and “refuse”.

The union between welfare and consumption is the principal characteristic of present day developed





Images from Welfare State (Smash The Ghetto), 2007

societies. Once basic needs are fulfilled, consumption provides new symbolic meanings that go way beyond the actual object being consumed. Freedom, social progress, solidarity and democracy are accessible through consumption and the targeting of the capitalist worldview is generated through the mechanisms of the performance - like a Deborian spectacle.

In this context we proposed a meeting between the integrated and the marginalised society at the time when the welfare state moves to clear El Salobral, one of the largest slum settlements in Europe. In March 2008, the City Council agreed to its demolition and the consequent rehousing of its inhabitants, the majority of whom come from Roma heritage. In this settlement those persons who are clearly marginalized by socio-cultural factors are found together with other social outcasts who harbour voluntarily in the ghetto's shadows (such as drug dealers in search of an area away from police vigilance). On the other hand, the demolition of the slums, and the consequent relocation of its occupants attract new inhabitants who come to this area looking to be rewarded with a new home by the welfare state.

We conceived of the staging of the demolition of this marginal community as a performance for all members of civil society. Over and above considerations such as the disappearance of specific cultural forms (that of the Roma culture), civil society celebrates the disappearance of the ghetto via a media performance. The integrated members of civil society are the hooligans who applaud the action of the diggers demolishing the ghetto. The path of the marginalized society is their forced integration into the spectacle of consumptive society.



Democracia was formed in Madrid (Spain) by Pablo España and Iván López. Their decision to work as a group springs from the intention of engaging in an artistic practice centred on discussion and the clash of ideas and forms of action. They also work in publishing (they are directors of Nolens Volens magazine) and curatorial projects (No Futuro, Madrid Abierto 2008, Creador de Dueños). They were founders and part of El Perro group (1989-2006).



# Chapter 3:

*(Sub) Urban Dream (ing)*

*For some people, to never attain the status of “home-owner” is to never quite achieve the status of being grown up; owning a home is the very least every middle class parent expects for their offspring*

*– David Burrows.*

# Solids and Solutions.

DAVID BURROWS

**I**t is a hot and humid summer afternoon in Sydney but the real estate agent from Potts Point is taking ten steps to the dozen, hurrying towards his two o'clock. It is not everyday that he is invited to value a house with a view of the harbour in Woolloomooloo, a property that, furthermore, stands virtually opposite the Woolloomooloo Hotel. The address, 'Artspace 43-51 Cowper Wharf Road', was a little perplexing. A minor complication though which soon evaporated as the estate agent calculated his percentage of a future transaction. And then his excitement doubled as he realised the address he had been given corresponded not to a three bedroom house but a fucking three storey building. He took one last gulp of his orange barley water, draining the bottle, and then entered through the glass doors.

"I thought you wanted a house evaluation?" the agent exclaimed and was surprised when told that this was indeed the case and that the house could be found in the large gallery space on the left. And to his left he found a compact stack of wood, bricks and tiles. He realised that each layer of this dusty lasagna had once belonged to a house that had served as somebody's residence; now the pile of stone, timber and metal could only play host to small rodents and bugs. A minute's silence passed which was followed by a loud belly laugh. The estate agent was not a man who angered easily and he enjoyed a good joke, even when it was made at his own expense. The penny dropped and he realised he was standing in an art gallery looking at art. He smiled sheepishly, wished everyone good luck with the project while handing out his card - you never know he thought - and then made to leave. But these guys were serious, they wanted to know how much he thought the house was worth.

The estate agent circled the four corners of the stack and passed judgement: "Well in my opinion it is worthless, even as scrap, though it is nicely arranged and ordered. As art, well I'm no expert but I read that a sculpture of a giant pregnant woman sold for \$900,000 the other day. This is just an ugly pile of debris and it

smells foul but it is very big. One thing it has going for it is its size. Maybe it is worth a twentieth of what the museum paid for the pregnant women, I don't know. Now if the house was still standing - in this location - then we could make some real money. We'd be talking six figures, possibly seven depending on the condition of the interior." And this is how the *Cordial Home Project*, an art-work consisting of the elements of a house arranged in a rectangular block between the wooden pillars of Artspace, was priced at \$950,000.

Or at least that is how I imagined a sale price which could have been agreed for the *Cordial Home Project*. Perhaps this fantasy is not too far fetched as the cost of an artwork is abstract and fluctuates just like the market price of real estate. But to dwell on the economic value of the *Cordial Home Project*, despite economics being of some concern to the artists Sean Cordeiro and Claire Healy, would be to frame that work as a Duchampian gesture. Something that I do not believe the artists intended.

For the *Cordial Home Project* is invested with much symbolism, an investment that plays on the irony of Cordeiro and Healy finding themselves in a situation familiar to many of their generation: they are unable to acquire a home of their own, a fact they have been keen to state throughout the project. And for some people, to never attain the status of "home-owner" is to never quite achieve the status of being grown up; owning a home is the very least every middle class parent expects for their offspring. The irony is that the only way the artists could acquire a home was by taking possession of a house due for demolition and dismantling it piece by piece; an act which did not require any financial exchange but that made the newly acquired building homeless. Artspace only provided a temporary abode for the project and during the exhibition the home was only one step away from the scrap heap.

But there was more to the *Cordial Home Project* than a slice of real estate realism. The colossal effort of installing the "Home" was a bigger task than Cordeiro and Healy could manage on their own. Many hands assisted the two artists. Much was made of the help given by family and friends when the exhibition opened.

And in a *Zeitgeist* newspaper article Claire Healy was interviewed as a representative of a generation that would never experience the joys of owning a property and therefore banded together with their peers to rent and share accommodation. In various ways, the *Cordial Home Project* is symbolic of collaboration, partnership and community that the artists value and rely on in their daily lives.

All this made me think of something I read over a decade and a half ago, an angry paragraph written by Jean Baudrillard about a young generation who “practised solidarity with the greatest of ease” and who were no longer ashamed of, or troubled by, capital and its accumulation. I realised that he was writing about my own generation and those people a bit older than me. In fact I came to think of the generation that practised “solidarity with the greatest of ease” as those artists often cited as Young British Artists (YBAs). The solidarity symbolised by Cordeiro and Healy’s project is of a different kind, formed from a shared feeling of disempowerment and the knowledge that for certain ambitions to be realised collaboration and community is necessary.

The complexities of the processes involved in constructing the *Cordial Home Project* and its attendant symbolism and themes has its precedents

## To never attain the status of “home-owner” is to never quite achieve the status of being grown up; owning a home is the very least every middle class parent expects for their offspring

in the work of other artists. Dan Graham’s analysis of housing in *Homes for America* comes to mind, as does the work of Rachel Whiteread who cast the space of an East London house, a monumental example of her practice of negative formalism. However, it is Gordon Matta-Clark that I first thought of when I encountered the *Cordial Home Project*. Matta-Clark trained as an architect and thought of his practice of slicing and cutting up buildings as a critique of a kind. The artist only selected buildings that were uninhabited and due for destruction, he was not happy with the architectural practices of his contemporaries who ignored the life span of buildings and also with the fact that many structures did not out-live either their designers or inhabitants. What struck me when I first saw the documentation of Matta-Clark’s work was that the act of carving and slicing, as beautiful and as breath-taking as the results were, seemed to express the artist’s dissatisfaction with things. Not exactly a violent protest but a statement of his desire to re-draw the Euclidean space of a building and that building’s relationship to its exterior and the space of the city.

It is at this point, when I made the comparison with Matta-Clark, that I begun to consider what might be found beyond the symbolism of the *Cordial Home Project*. I should come clean and say that it is not the expression of dissatisfaction that interests me in an artwork but the form of that expression. What excites me about art is not an allusion to the state of things but the suggestion of what does not exist. This is what I value most in Matta-Clark’s work. My concern for the form of an expression might be considered old fashioned by some but it is an approach I apply when encountering all works of art.

The *Cordial Home Project* was perhaps not much to look at and the details of the building and its contents, clues to previous owner’s life and times, were hidden in the interior of the structure; but this was something I welcomed as it avoided any suggestion of the humanism evident in Rachel Whiteread’s work which sentimentalises the traces of time passed in a domestic space. It was the weight of the piece that impressed most, a dirty mass of second-hand building materials presented in the useless state of an artwork.

The impression was one of a negative expression. Except I remember that the artists stated that they wanted to discover the essence of a house. I am far too skeptical to believe that a house can have an essence or for that matter, to believe in essences much at all; but I liked the idea that the artists wanted to reflect upon the status, comforts and security offered by a house, even if this interest in essences was at odds with the artists’ declared project of deconstructing the home. But it is the title of the piece that opens up the work, that suggests that the material exhibited by Healy and Cordeiro could be anything other than an inert mass of junk that reflects a dire circumstance of everyday life.

“Cordial Home”, of course, implies not just a warm and welcoming “Home” but a condensed substance that can be reconstituted as a place to dwell in. A solution of some sort is needed for that reconstitution to occur but what that solution might be remains elusive. It is not just a question of pumping mortar or air into a collection of bricks and wood. This is where the real interest and impact of the work lies, with the work’s missing ingredient. That no solution is suggested by the artists and that a solution is difficult for the viewer to imagine makes the *Cordial Home Project* less of a proposition and more of an allegory about the need for change. I have a feeling that the negative aspects of the work outweigh the other elements such as collaboration, an aspect of the work celebrated by the artists. But then whether solutions can be found for the concerns raised by the *Cordial Home Project* is not necessarily for Cordeiro and Healy to say to but something for society at large to confront.



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# Cordial Home Project


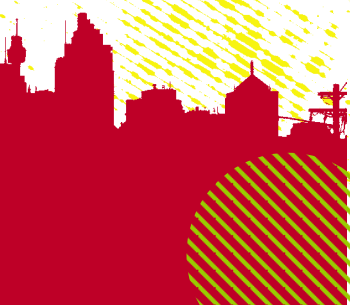
2003

CLAIRE HEALY AND SEAN CORDEIRO



# Sub/urban Dream(ing): Land Speculation and the Quarter Acre Block.

LOUISE CRABTREE



**T**his is a deeply and unapologetically political assessment of what is wrong with Australian suburbia and what this might mean for the future of land use in this country. Australian suburban patterns of land occupation and exchange have been shaped by, and continue to shape, both our perceptions of the land and the people who live on it. The endless growth of the suburban sprawl reveals a history of displacement, denial and delusion, but also of aspiration, identity and hope. This contradiction has led us to a perilous state in which suburbia, something so fundamental to our identity, has been increasingly attacked as the agent of our imminent demise. We thus have vital issues forcing us to confront how we occupy sub/urban space; pressures which reveal underlying fault lines in our relationship to the land and each other.

To begin, early suburban occupation was a mixed affair: farms, factories, houses, jails, public administration and schools hastily erected in an eerie

juxtaposition to existing Indigenous socio-cultural infrastructures. These anomalies were brushed aside, the suburban project continuing with little inquiry into our curious and particularly Antipodean suburban nomenclature, or why our suburbs have names, such as Parramatta or Warrawee.

Underpinning this physical expansion of colonial Sydney were three driving factors. First, was a deep-seated rejection of the squalor and repression of the English urban environment. Second, oddly, was a desire to mimic the tendency of the landed gentry of that country to display wealth through fancy display gardens, private parklands and the like. Third, was the sheer vastness of the newly occupied country and its imagined/concocted emptiness. The overwhelming preponderance of lower socioeconomic classes among Sydney's early suburbanites, generated a heady brew of individualism which crystallised in the notion of "a fair go", which posits that anyone can make it in life if they apply themselves.



This was a curious mix which hints at the embryonic Australian suburban ideology, rejecting the authority of the ruling class while simultaneously appropriating its aesthetics, behaviours and memes. Ironically, while the early European Australians were supposedly providing a “fair go” and rejecting the social and physical repression of the Old World, the suburban form they created mirrored a lot of its trappings. So while we attempted to develop ourselves as independent of the Old World, we still relied on a lot of its signifiers to mark our status and territory. This ambivalence obviously continues to this day as we struggle with ideas of republicanism and national identity.

In both Australia and the United States, suburbia seems to have bloomed after World War II, when legions of traumatised returning soldiers were calmed and rewarded with a quarter-acre block and a modest home (frequently self-built). Decent hardworking folk were compensated for the years of grief during the war while simultaneously building the nation through homeownership and the dutiful consumption of mass produced automobiles and whitegoods. In the United States, the post-war agendas of labour stabilisation and mass consumption were conflated in the design of the suburban home:

*Both union leaders and manufacturers agreed that a more spacious, mass-produced form of housing was essential to enable workers and their families to consume. A growing number of employers decided that it would be a good idea to miniaturize and mass-produce the Victorian patriarchal, suburban businessman's dwelling for the majority of white, male skilled workers.<sup>1</sup>*

Some were brazen in their agenda, stating on record with a bluntness that seems astonishing in hindsight that: the only way to stop workers organising against corporate leaders was to break up the slums, move people into the suburbs and preoccupy them with maintaining their lawn:

*Get them to invest in their homes and own them. Then they won't leave and they won't strike. It ties them down so they have a stake in our prosperity<sup>2</sup>*

We can't find anyone stating that on record in Australia, but we followed the same format; rolling out new suburbs predicated on easy car access and a cheap supply of apparently endless amenable land, filling our climate-inappropriate houses with ever-increasing forms of consumer goods. The fact that this was based on the miniaturisation of a Victorian businessman's home is curious in an Australian context: yet again, we take on the trappings of the upper echelons while thinking we're beyond class structures.

Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the “fair go” translated in an equal right to the consumptive behaviours of the upper classes and the subsequent growth of the middle class (what we today call the aspirant classes). The increasing consumption levels of the middle class all worked well for a while (Indigenous displacement notwithstanding) but I

want to turn to where this all has led us. I'm more of an activist than an historian, and while we can get all nostalgic for backyard pools, push-button convenience and the joy of easy motoring, it's time to say: 'oh dear'.

Now, I'm not going to go on about the looming cluster fuck of peak oil, climate change, diminishing housing affordability, persistent issues of social inequity and the ongoing loss of good agricultural land from the Sydney Basin. Let's just say, we have some problems with our urban socioeconomic and physical structures. Somewhere in our post-war frenzy of urban expansion, either we lost sight of whatever egalitarianism we thought was underpinning the whole project or that egalitarianism was revealed to be a ruse for increasingly individualistic consumption. It was probably somewhere in between the two: the myth of individualism inherent in the “fair go” is a ready vessel for promoting unfettered consumption, particularly when consumption is sold as the ultimate egalitarian enterprise. When this is overlaid on the suburban expanse, and written down in tenure forms, we end up with ideas of property and propriety deeply inscribed with an individualist perception of the right to unfettered consumption, with an individualist perception of the right to private home-ownership.

Unfortunately this leaves us with an impoverished perception of home and land as commodities: we define land tenure through notions of winners and losers. We fetishise private ownership, subsuming public investment within a philosophy of individualised property rights. When speculative pressures operate in a closed system, such as that governing the supply of amenable suburban land, affordability goes out the window.

But the reality is we don't have an endless supply of land and we can't keep playing some kind of speculative “survival of the fittest” in the systems of land ownership that are supposed to be housing us. First, we have to retain and increase food production in the Sydney Basin, as it may be one of the few places left that doesn't intermittently burn down to bare soil or get swept out to sea, or which doesn't produce food which requires endless fertilising, irrigating, packaging, refrigerating and transporting to reach us in a decent condition. Second, we need ways of housing, feeding, employing, transporting, entertaining and caring for ourselves that don't rely on fossil fuels, profligate water misuse or us continually trampling each other in a race to “the top”.

Neither of these points is being well addressed in current policies and practices of housing affordability, informed and shaped as they are by a Monopoly-inspired property scrum. Consequently, affordable housing ekes out an existence in the margins, either as under-funded, over-burdened and stigmatised public housing, or, as community housing, which has as its primary business the provision of affordable rent as a transitional state through which the tenant passes as quickly as possible on the way to the ultimate prize of homeownership. In these, the tenant is a passive, deficient recipient of welfare with largely no input into management.

Now, I really have to digress at this point. I am a supporter of both public housing and community housing, but I am deeply underwhelmed by the conditions under which these operate. We currently have an immature and undeveloped housing system which has not yet conceptualised forms of non-individualist interpretations of property. Even our experiments with shared equity homeownership still rest on a speculative or profit-based understanding of property which assume *of course* the resident will want to buy out their purchase partner and ride off into a dollar-encrusted sunset.

There have been deafeningly silent voices in this account so far. Of course this land was occupied - intricate systems of land use and territoriality were well established when Europeans arrived and declared the continent empty. We're feeling pretty bad about that, and all the subsequent ills, but haven't really figured out what to do about it other than the occasional grand gesture, which is a start. However, we want to—and should—do more. David Tacey claims that contemporary Australian environmentalism and reconciliation are manifestations of a peculiarly Antipodean search for meaningful engagement with ideas of the sacred, the larger-than-self, or the embedded self. He urges shifting the metaphor of the vertical to the horizontal arm of the Cross in describing transitions away from hierarchical, abstract and distant notions of the sacred, to ones more characterised by immediacy, tangibility and practicality. This is also manifest in a growing—and historically based—distrust of authority and a desire to engage, to see action and movement on pressing issues, free of power plays, corruption and moral bankruptcy.

So if we are engaging with reconciliation and environmentalism, what does that auger for our suburbs? While talk of resilient cities and communities takes hold, a curious absence of discussion about tenure and property remains. It is as though we hope that the changes we are being told to make to our patterns of living, consuming and participating can somehow happen within the context of currently predominant forms of tenure and property relations. Maybe they can, but I'm not convinced. While we are told to go local and/or grow our own, there simply isn't enough demand for boutique foods for us to pay off \$500,000 mortgages through backyard production. What's more, the insane amount of paid work required to feed that mortgage (or rent) really doesn't leave enough hours to set up that cooperative effectively.

Perhaps this clinging to what we know is fuelled by the sense that our current global economic system is falling into the mincer and we have no idea what form it will take as it comes squirming out the other side. Meanwhile, the business-as-usual crew and the survivalists (*a la* Mad Max) duke it out to be media darlings *du jour*. Neither of these camps offer particularly appealing options for dealing with the multiple challenges facing us and curiously, they are quite similar. Both rest on the continuing assumption that we are locked in a conquest battle of survival of the fittest, whether economically (business-as-usual) or physically (Mad Max). If we really must rely on ecology for our metaphors and models, we would do better to follow Matthew

In both Australia and the United States, suburbia seems to have bloomed after World War II, when legions of traumatised returning soldiers were calmed and rewarded with a quarter-acre block and a modest home (frequently self-built). Decent hardworking folk were compensated for the years of grief during the war while simultaneously building the nation through homeownership and the dutiful consumption of mass produced automobiles and whitegoods.

Ridley's account of cooperation in the management of ecosystems. Ridley focuses on ideas of resilience in ecosystem management and talks about ongoing learning processes, communication channels and changes to property regimes. Successful systems close the loop between cause and effect, so that there is immediate feedback between an individual and their behaviour. To achieve this, the need to cooperate is often institutionalised through multi-scaled governance mechanisms which basically mean that as many of the parties concerned with the system as possible come together to manage it. This hybridity of scale aims to combine broader resources and knowledge with locally appropriate, accessible and contextual knowledge and structures.

To give an example: Community Land Trusts (CLTs) are a form of land tenure which emerged in the United States. They came from a 1950s drive to help African American farmers retain tenure on their farmlands. During the 60s they outgrew this civil rights model morphing into a focus on rights and housing stability in the 1970s and 1980s. Through the 1990s, the CLTs expanded as an affordable housing model, and since 2000 their growth has been exponential. It seems their origins in homesteading have been returned to, with CLTs now underpinning multiple programs combining housing with food security and employment.

CLTs operate as a non-profit organization which holds title to land in perpetuity; property holders (homeowners, renters, businesses, charities, community organisations, etc.) hold title to buildings and a ground lease between the CLT and the property holder then spells out the use, inheritance and resale conditions of the property. CLTs stipulate no speculation, no absenteeism. Consequently CLT homes have been largely immune to the sub-prime collapse and are able to house people on a wide range of incomes, including through the provision of homeownership that is affordable to low-income households.

For the purposes of creating sustainable and equitable sub/urban futures, the really interesting part of CLTs is their board structure. The board is equal thirds Trust residents, non-resident members and institutional bodies such as planners, architects, local government, funding agencies, regulatory bodies, local businesses, charities, etc. This is a stroke of genius: the creation of an ongoing forum in which diverse stakeholders have to regularly meet and govern the stewardship of land without a speculative base.

CLTs operate in all types of spaces, communities and architectures in the US. They underlie and drive individually owned homes and condominiums, housing cooperatives, cohousing developments, ecovillages, youth employment schemes, child care facilities, food security programs, artists' workspaces, legal aid centres, farms and many others. They are found from the heart of NYC and San Francisco through to rural Wisconsin and the old farms of the Deep South. Currently the CLTs' numbers are growing rapidly and are being viewed as a channel for US federal funding aimed at stabilising communities rocked by the sub-prime mortgage ruptures.

While seemingly novel, the understanding of land that underpins the CLTs is not that new. It sits pretty well with what was going on when Europeans arrived in Australia and would suit our current challenges well. Our sub/urban communities and spaces are faced with issues of energy price increases, water insecurity, financial instability, housing prices and the social unrest that any one of these can fuel. Further, our sub/urban psyche rests on the Great Australian Unease, that gut-level sense that we still haven't dealt honestly with our colonial past. If we are in fact striving for genuine reconciliation then we may want to start by looking at the potential for sub/urban retrofits driven by multi-scaled non-profit governance mechanisms on a non-speculative base.



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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Hayden D (1984) *Redesigning the American Dream: the Future of Housing, Work, and Family Life*. W W Norton and Company, New York, p33.

<sup>2</sup> an industrialist cited in *ibid*, p33



SEPTEMBER 08



OCTOBER 08



NOVEMBER 08



DECEMBER 08



JANUARY 09



FEBRUARY 09



MARCH 09



APRIL 09



MAY 09



JUNE 09

Elapsing over two summers, two autumns, a winter and a spring, my interest within this project is in the strong opinion and emotion that attends the London Plane tree (*Platanus acerifolia*). It is both the most commonly planted street tree in Sydney, and the most widely despised for the profuse, fine, allergy-provoking bristles that aid seed dispersal from the flower-heads. It is the tree that everyone hates. While favoured for its tolerance of contemporary urban conditions - bad air, poor light, compacted soil and little water - its detractors are many, from talkback radio callers to prominent Australian scientist Tim Flannery. Flannery has often argued against the planting of London Planes in Sydney streets, as both a persistent mimicry of European cities and a failure to explore alternatives from our ample native species that would better foster insect life and biodiversity, which plane trees notably do not.

Propagated from the ready surplus of seed lying in local streets, *The Lively Plane (continued)* has become a mesh of daily practices including cultivation, observation, reading, problem-solving, mistake-making and consultation. A learning-by-doing exercise in amateur horticulture, the potential disruption to the regulated management of street trees by city councils points to the minimised influence of individuals in planting public space. Likewise the significance of "leafy streets" to neighbourhood desirability and nature's entanglement in the mechanics of gentrification becomes another resonant thread.

## The Lively Plane (continued).

LISA KELLY

[www.studiononstop.net](http://www.studiononstop.net)

PRESENTING THE  
**EVIL BROTHERS**  
**TUNNEL VISION GHOST TRAIN**  
CARRIAGE WORKS • REDFERN in MAY & JUNE 09

DO  
WE  
DARE  
WALK  
ON  
THE  
OTHER  
SIDE?





# Chapter 4:

## *Smashing Up The Furniture*

*The practices of architecture, planning and design, through the formal production of space, have forever been used to reinforce the interests of the economically and politically powerful. As the work of architects literally makes concrete the desires of those with the means to buy, build and hire, we are simultaneously building out all those who do not. We measure out space, detailing precisely what goes where, who gets what, uncritically making physical the social and economic divisions of the society in which we build. So for all the developments in aesthetics and technology, we move the city nowhere, we change nothing, stuck in a game of endlessly rearranging the furniture, making noise but changing nothing.*

*– Hugo Moline*

# SMASHING UP THE FURNITURE: Adventures in activist architecture

HUGO MOLINE



1.

**T**he practices of architecture, planning and design, through the formal production of space, have forever been used to reinforce the interests of the economically and politically powerful. As the work of architects literally makes concrete the desires of those with the means to buy, build and hire, we are simultaneously building out space, detailing precisely what goes where, who gets what, uncritically making physical the social and economic divisions of the society in which we build. So for all the developments in aesthetics and technology, we move the city nowhere, we change

nothing, stuck in a game of endlessly rearranging the furniture, making noise but changing nothing.

But from Bangkok to Rotterdam, from Brooklyn to Redfern, innovative, alternative practices are emerging. There are architects who have chosen to smash up the furniture and invite local people to help make something better from the pieces. These practices have rejected the old mercenary paradigm, of reinforcing the spatial will of the few who can pay, and by doing so have regained their own independence and the power to change the way our cities are produced.

Crucially these new practices seek out collaborations with the people who actually use





2.



3.



4.



5.

**OPPOSITE: IMAGE 1.** La Mona (the Doll), or Tijuana III Millenium, a 17 metre high sculpture built by Armando Muñoz Garcia in his backyard in Colonia Aeropuerto as a tribute to his city on the occasion of Tijuana's first centenary in 1989. **ABOVE: IMAGE 2.** Illustration by ETC of the process by which the Mecalux frames can be delivered and appropriated by the people to make secure housing in Tijuana's informal settlements. **IMAGE 3.** A new pathway in Ayutthaya built by the people themselves leads to other spontaneous improvements. **IMAGE 4.** Two shopkeepers from Samchuk market performing in the music video. **IMAGE 5.** The underbridge squatters discuss their plans (left) then build them in front of the Housing Authority (right). **IMAGE 6.** One of CUP's teaching tools, participants use the pieces on the left to construct a map of housing affordability for different occupations and income brackets, making visible the socio-economic divisions in housing and what housing assistance programs they may have access to. **IMAGE 7.** Members of the CTU in Punto Fijo spend Saturday morning collectively tiling one of their new houses.



6.



7.

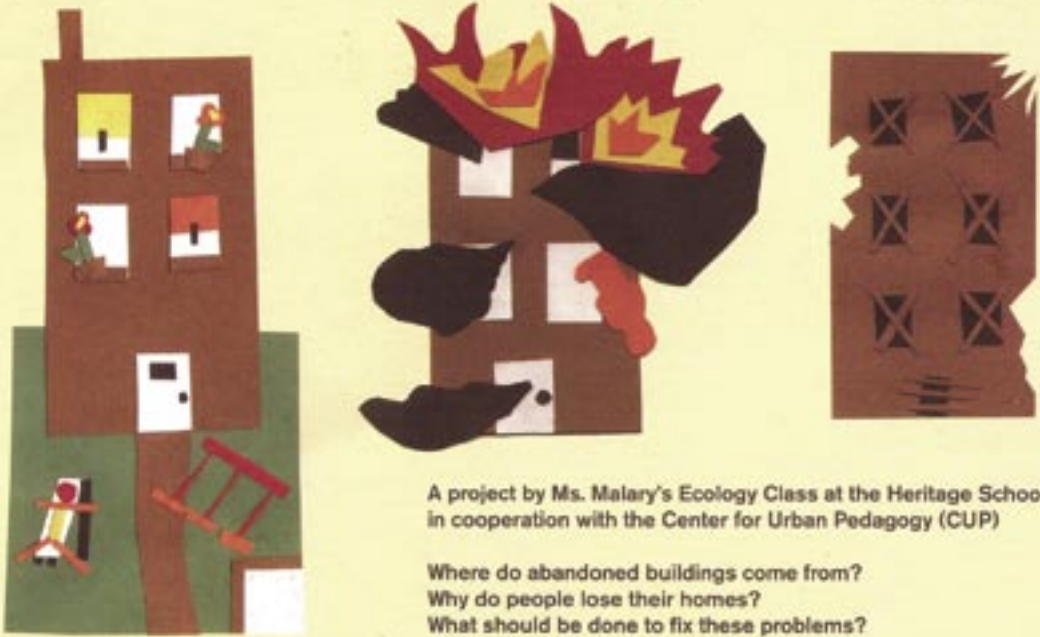
the places they design. They join with community organisations, activist groups and people in the street to pursue interests outside of the existing power structure. They use architecture as a vehicle to explore and expose entrenched socio-spatial injustice and to create concrete alternatives. They continue to learn and innovate, becoming ever more rigorous, open and effective. These practices are as diverse as the highly specific geo-political contexts in which they work. CASE Studio of Thailand, Estudio Teddy Cruz of the San Diego/Tijuana Border region, the WiMBY! Hoogvliet project of Rotterdam, the Center for Urban Pedagogy in Brooklyn, Park Fiction and the Collective Production of Desires in Hamburg, the Permanent Workshop for Participatory Design in Caracas and the global network of Slum/Shack

Dwellers International represent just a few of the diverse approaches to reinventing the way we make our cities.

#### **CASE Studio: Open questions and sideways tactics**

The *Community Architects for Shelter and Environment (CASE)* are a group of young Thai architects based in Min Buri, an outlying suburb of Bangkok. Working in different constellations for over 10 years, CASE began as a small team working out of a garage providing architectural advocacy to communities living in the underserved and excluded informal settlements growing across Thailand. Over the years CASE has collaborated with underbridge squatters, communities facing eviction, canal-side settlers, itinerant building labourers and

The connection between abandoned buildings and homeless people



A postcard advertising one of CUP's High School collaborations which became a vehicle for wider debate on the issues of urban planning.



Diagram by Estudio Teddy Cruz explaining Casa Familiar's proposal for a new social architecture in Living Rooms on the Border.

many other groups on how to collectively improve their situation. CASE differs from many architects who do similar work in the depth and creativity of their approach to participatory design. In their work they are continuously striving to question and reveal the situation of the communities in which they work and to create accurate representations of these communities' visions for change. In their work they have assembled an impressively subtle and versatile practice and philosophy which, through a combination of flexibility, tireless questioning and a cunning indirectness, provides guidance in the often murky territory of participatory design and community engagement.

The CASE architects initiate open conversation with communities in crisis in order to collectively uncover the reality of their situation. They ask questions, start a discussion, often leading to understandings and responses which neither the community nor the architects could have predicted at the beginning. Accordingly the products of these collaborations are often surprising and fall outside the traditional boundaries of architecture. Their projects to date have included: a house made of biscuit tins, a concrete pathway which stopped a destructive new road, a music video which united a community and a full-scale model village built as a protest and publicity stunt – as well as a wide range of housing, infrastructure and livelihood projects. These artifacts, though richly worked and highly successful, are, for CASE, secondary to the real goal of the work: to bring people together, to expose conflicts and open up contradictions, to increase people's understanding of their own situation, and to connect them more strongly to their place and each other, increasing their potential for collective action to make positive change.

CASE aims to get maximum impact from minimal gesture. During the mass evictions of Bangkok's underbridge squatters, CASE hosted a collaborative workshop in which the squatters could set down their proposals for an equitable, people-led resettlement. After ten weeks of collective questioning and design activities in the workshop, the participants built full scale models of the resulting housing designs in bamboo and fabric on the steps of the government's housing authority. CASE organised a popular music festival to accompany the building of the spontaneous settlement. The action generated a great deal of publicity for the squatters and demonstrated their capacity to determine their own future. The housing authority was left with little option but to support and assist the construction of a permanent, serviced resettlement.

Flexibility and opportunism are also crucial to CASE's work. When they arrived in Ayutthaya to work on another resettlement design, this time for a group being evicted to make way for a new road, they found a community solidly opposed to being 'resettled'. Rather than pushing ahead with the planned design workshop they began meeting with the community to determine what else they could do together. The boggy central access way was an item of common concern. Without the funding (which had been dependent on complying with the eviction) CASE proposed a model where every family contributed labour and chipped in for materials in

order to construct a new path. The people did it and were so taken with the result that they began other upgrading works, painting their houses, planting new gardens and paving communal areas. The city officials were impressed by the spontaneous renovation and plans for the new road were shelved.

Community is a highly idealised concept, but the realities of conflict and entrenched local politics require CASE to approach some situations in radically imaginative ways. The once thriving riverside Samchuk markets were decaying and unpopular. When CASE attempted to start a community design process on how best to revive the markets they found a group of merchants deeply divided by old feuds and dominated by a strict hierarchy. Fortunately they also found a young musician living in Samchuk who had written a song about the place. Rather than getting bogged down in local politics or allowing the established heavyweights to dominate the conversation the CASE team changed tack completely and produced a music video for the Samchuk song. They filmed the disparate community members lip-syncing to the words, then edited the footage, placing those in conflict side by side. When the people saw the video they began to see their differences fade. Those in conflict began to speak, those without a voice found confidence and the process of working on the market could really begin.

### **Estudio Teddy Cruz: Critical proposals for the borderlands.**

The role of architecture in exploring and exposing the politics of space is also key to the work of Estudio Teddy Cruz, a research-based architecture studio located in the borderland of San Diego/Tijuana. From this site of conflict he instigates projects which reveal, critique and suggest alternatives to discriminatory spatial practices from uneven global border flows to biased neighbourhood zoning laws.

Through these projects new building typologies are invented, new financial and political relationships are created, new tactics for subverting existing regulations and institutions are explored. Where others see problems Cruz finds opportunities. How can the exploitative labour practices of global corporations in post North American Free Trade Agreement Tijuana be used to support housing for the workers they rely on? How can the massive influx of Latin Americans into San Diego be harnessed to reinvent stultifying Anglo-American suburbia?

San Ysidro, the neighbourhood at the world's busiest border crossing and home to many of the Latin American immigrants who have settled in San Diego, is the site for *Living Rooms at the Border*, an affordable housing collaboration with Casa Familiar, a local, non-profit social service provider.

The typically suburban environment of San Ysidro has been progressively changing through its appropriation by successive immigrants. Unofficial house extensions have densified the area and brought life to back alleys. Informal garage industries and businesses have created livelier, mixed use streets. Drawing from these phenomena Cruz and Casa Familiar have created a new kind of housing

project, one which interweaves multiple social and economic programs while opening up specifically ambiguous spaces for people to appropriate and make their own. In doing so the project challenges those planning regulations which are antithetical to the creation of affordable housing and functional, living neighbourhoods.

Where the regulations only allow three units, the project proposes a mixed village of twelve: Where the regulations only allow housing the project weaves together five complementary uses. Cruz proposes that density needs to be redefined not as the number of units per acre, but rather as the number of social and economic exchanges per acre (such density is allowed by tactics like sharing kitchens between households, an arrangement not uncommon in the area). The housing is complemented by a social centre, offices for Casa Familiar, a park and a community garden. The central pedestrian street through the project is flanked by a series of semi enclosed spaces. These spaces, below the housing, adjacent to the park and loaded with connections to water and electricity, are designed to be taken over and re-imagined, perhaps used as market stalls, an informal kindergarten, a workshop, cubby house or a place to sit and play dominos.

In a smaller project, also in San Ysidro, Cruz and Casa Familiar combine the mutually supportive programs of aged housing and child care, also a common existing pattern within the community where older residents often care for their grandchildren while the parents are at work. It is hoped that both projects will act as catalysts to confront, expose and change the planning regulations. Already the San Diego City Council is trialing a system of Affordable Housing Overlay Zones, which offer exemptions for sites being developed for affordable housing.

Through their projects Cruz and Casa are also combating the affordable housing financing system which, due to a catch 22 with planning regulations, are actually preventing any affordable housing from being developed in San Ysidro. The problem is that projects must have more than fifty units to be eligible for government loans and subsidies, however projects with more than fifty units are expressly forbidden by local planning regulations. Cruz and Casa propose a model where fifty individual households collectively receive the funds to be split up into numerous projects, perhaps five smaller developments or even fifty backyard granny-flats, providing density and income. These loans could be paid back at least partially through sweat equity, becoming labourers in the construction process or contributing hours to the communities social services.

Over the border Tijuana has seen the arrival of a very different kind of border-crosser, the *maquiladoras*, assembly plants for multinational corporations such as Hyundai, Sony and Walmart. After the NAFTA the *maquiladoras* were set up in Tijuana, as in all Mexican border cities, to take advantage of Mexico's low wages and lax labour laws while remaining close to their customers in the USA. The workers for the *maquiladoras* live in the improvised, unserviced and precarious settlements on the mesa.

Among the *maquiladoras*, Cruz identified Mecalux, a manufacturer of modular industrial shelving. Using their components, Cruz has designed a structural system which he proposes could be donated by the *maquiladora* to its workers, ensuring structural soundness while leaving all decision of spatial configuration and cladding to the occupant/builder.

Perhaps Cruz's greatest strength is his highly tactical approach. The project exposes and explores the enormous exploitation at play in the *maquiladora* industry while simultaneously providing the *maquiladoras* with a readily achievable way to begin to redeem themselves. He never simply presents a critique; it is always folded into a detailed and realistic solution.

Cruz's projects have a polemic value uncommon in architecture. Another project, *McMansion Retrofitted*, critiques the new wave of highly wasteful and inward-looking suburban housing by projecting their future reappropriation by immigrants. Cruz conducted interviews with Latino immigrants, including his Guatemalan mother, inside various "model homes". The suggestions which emerged from these interviews became the basis for a series of proposals for how a how a single family home could be altered to house three families and a variety of rotating social and economic programs.

#### **WiMBY Hoogvliet: Who's living in those old concrete blocks? Neighbourhood research and nexus for collaboration.**

The practice of architecture for Cruz becomes an opportunity to analyse, critique and intervene in the particular context of the Borderland, exposing its conflicts and attempting to harness its enormous creative potential. Through his projects he is able to address very local and specific issues while as revealing global and universal concerns: of borders, migration, exploitation and inequality. In a similar way the *WiMBY! (Welcome into My Back Yard!)* *Hoogvliet* project takes the much maligned post-war social housing suburb of Hoogvliet in Rotterdam as a very specific context to learn from and engage with. The project began when the Crimson Architectural Historians and Felix Rottenberg saw an opportunity in the planned restructuring of Hoogvliet in 2001 to provide an independent platform for research and community collaboration to develop concrete projects for Hoogvliet's future. *WiMBY!* set up physically in Hoogvliet and began to organise events, workshops, and projects to explore the present situation in Hoogvliet and generate proposals on how things could change.

Over its six years of activity in Hoogvliet, *WiMBY!* has produced a diverse array of proposals, activities and built work. Projects have included new school buildings, a single mother's housing workshop, the redesign of post-war housing for youth, a guesthouse for politicians and journalists to visit and learn about Hoogvliet, co-housing for musicians or people who grow vegetables, a project to bring wildlife and the tides back to the dikes and a Hoogvliet public themepark complete with make-your-own party villa, open air cinema, swimming lake and hobby huts.

WiMBY! has functioned as a kind of linking mechanism between people in the community with unfulfilled needs for housing or public space (young people, single mothers, anti-social musicians, schoolchildren, immigrants from Surinam etc) and the designers, architects, ecologists, politicians and journalists who could help to help to develop the solutions.

**The Center for Urban Pedagogy: Educational tools to understand the city and how to change it.**

*The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP)*, based in Brooklyn, also acts as a hinge between underserved communities and designers who can assist them. For CUP the practice of effecting change in cities is less about the design of buildings to the design of educational tools, ways for people to understand and navigate the physical, social, political and economic systems in which urban life operates. By facilitating collaborations between a diverse range of actors CUP has produced 'teaching tools' ranging from a two metre long interactive fabric graph to help people understand the complexities of housing affordability, income brackets and available support programs to a map of cargo routes to assist the coordination of striking dock workers and "*What's up with Public Housing, a Guide to Participation*", a community produced TV show using skits, animation and documentary to spread awareness of how residents could impact the decisions on how public housing funds are spent.

A large part of CUP's work takes place in inner city high schools. Taking the "City as a Classroom" concept, resident teaching artists guide the students through intensive six-month investigations on subjects as diverse as what happens to the city's garbage, the demographics of incarceration and the links between vacant buildings and homelessness in New York City. These projects, while enabling young people to engage in the issues of the city, also often reach far beyond the classroom, with works featuring in exhibitions, festivals, the media, and even turning into teaching tools in their own right.

**Park Fiction and the Collective Production of Desires: DIY urbanism, make your own plan.**

These emerging tactics are not the privileged domain of architects alone. Community groups are also independently adopting design as a powerful tool for securing their interests in their city. *Park Fiction*, a loose collective of engaged citizens in Hamburg's red-light district of St Pauli, were faced with the impending "redevelopment" of their local park by politicians and real estate speculators eager to capitalise on its central location and harbour views. Rather than following the traditional path of protest, Park Fiction launched their own parallel planning process, the *Collective Production of Desires*. The group set up a shipping-container office in the park (consisting of a modeling-clay office, a garden library, an archive of desires and a 24-hour hotline for contributing ideas). They also developed a portable planning-studio-in-a-suitcase for visits to surrounding suburbs. Through the community planning process that followed Park Fiction has been able to secure the park for continued use by local residents and has been able to find financing and construct many of the collected "Desires" including an artificial palm oasis, a flying carpet lawn, a boules field and three open-air solariums.

The Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP), based in Brooklyn, also acts as a hinge between underserved communities and designers who can assist them. For CUP the practice of effecting change in cities is less about the design of buildings to the design of educational tools, ways for people to understand and navigate the physical, social, political and economic systems in which urban life operates.

## **Los Comités de Tierra Urbana and the Permanent Workshop on Participative design: Securing land tenure and Auto-diagnosis for new modes of living.**

Opportunities for architects to involve themselves in these kinds of projects are increasing worldwide as previously marginalised communities become more organised, experienced and determined in claiming their rights to the city. In Venezuela *los Comités de Tierra Urbana* (Urban Land Committees, or CTUs) are self-organising federations of families living in the *barrios*, those sectors of the city built by residents themselves without official recognition or provision of services which house over half of the country's population. These CTUs, with assistance from the government, gain collective ownership of the land they occupy, an essential step to facilitating the incremental upgrading of these often precarious settlements.

The *Taller Permanente de Diseño Participativo* (Permanent Workshop on Participative Design) is a team of architects, mostly drawn from the Universidad Bolivariana de Venezuela, who provide the technical support for the CTUs. They provide assistance in upgrading roads, houses and basic services, and in the design of *Campamentos de Pioneros*, new settlements built and owned collectively. The main role of the Workshop is to ask questions and assist a process of *Auto-Diagnosis*, in which it is the people themselves who analyse their situation, their needs and desires. What is the slope of the land? How many grandchildren does Yexi have? How many hairdressers do we need? Where will we play dominoes? How will we treat wastewater? Why do we have to struggle when others have it so easy? The process does not restrict itself to planning; everything is up for discussion, resulting in a stronger, more informed community ready to fight for their plan and better their own situation.

## **Slum/Shack Dwellers International: Globalisation from below.**

Where government support structures are lacking, community based organisations are tapping into global support and experience sharing networks to assist in their development. *Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI)* is a federation of local, mostly women led, movements organised around micro-savings and housing rights. With its roots in India the federation now includes affiliates in 29 countries across the Global South from Honduras to Malawi and Timor Leste. SDI affiliates, such as the Homeless People's Federation of the Philippines, have appropriated professional planning methods to create maps and statistics of their undocumented homes, the first step in making them visible. In a true example of globalisation-from-below SDI facilitates exchanges between members to learn from one another. Participants travel from Nairobi to Colombo to discuss strategies to fight eviction, or from Payatas to Dili to assist the setting up of new savings groups. Although the most important exchanges are between members, the federations also make use of a wide range of professionals, engineers and architects, in the upgrading and construction of housing and services. In fact the majority of CASE Studio's projects have in fact been initiated by members of the Thai federation, without whose organisational support the projects would certainly have been impossible.

Working outside the interests of Capital and bureaucracy is not easy. Finding funding and support for such projects is a creative challenge in

itself. CASE has set up a construction company to subsidise their community projects, while Estudio Teddy Cruz works out of his university office and relies heavily on philanthropy, and others patch together cultural grants, micro-finance and government funding in order to continue their work. The federations of SDI are particularly amazing in this regard, often building projects solely on the time, labour and small savings of its members, most of whom live below the poverty line.

## **Taking back the city.**

These are still small movements, brief moments of resistance, peripheral happenings. But they are slowly, surely changing the way people see their city, not as a mute, generally oppressive background, but as a malleable object, a responsive environment, and potentially the physical manifestation of our lives and desires. Through their diverse work all these groups are demonstrating that through organisation, ingenuity and collective action it is possible to change our built landscape, that no matter who we are, the city is ours.



Hugo Moline is a designer, researcher and founder of the Milkcrate Unlimited -people's architecture workshop- an architectural open space for collaboration which works on projects of affordable housing and public space in Sydney's West. He has previously worked with the Homeless People's Federation of the Philippines and has spent the last two years visiting, investigating and working with CASE studio, Estudio Teddy Cruz, the Center for Urban Pedagogy and los Comités de Tierra Urbana as part of an international research project with support from the Byera Hadley Travelling Scholarship and the Dunlop Asia Fellowship.

LINKS:

CASE STUDIO:

<http://www.casestudio.info/2006/index.html>

ESTUDIO TEDDY CRUZ:

<http://www.politicaequator.org/>

WIMBY HOOGVLIET:

<http://www.wimby.nl/index.php>

THE CENTER FOR URBAN PEDAGOGY:

<http://www.anothercupdevelopment.org/>

PARK FICTION:

<http://www.peprav.net/tool/spip.php?article51>

LOS COMITÉS DE TIERRA URBANA:

[hugo@informalism.net](mailto:hugo@informalism.net) for texts and contacts

SHACK/SLUM DWELLERS INTERNATIONAL:

<http://www.sdinet.co.za>

# Dreaming The Block Aboriginal Housing Company Pemulwuy Redevelopment Project

ANGELA PITTS

Over the past 30 years the Redfern Aboriginal community has undergone a social transformation. In the early 1970s the lack of appropriate and affordable housing in Sydney led to the formation of the Aboriginal Housing Company (AHC). An initial grant facilitated by the Whitlam Government helped the AHC to purchase and restore the first six terrace houses that were being squatted by homeless people. This secured the first Aboriginal urban land rights in Australia and marked a period of genuine support and self-determination. With the assistance of architect Col James, the AHC began planning for the future of the community. Within ten years, the AHC had gradually purchased and restored around eighty-five dilapidated Victorian terrace houses on a site of approximately 0.8 hectares. By 1983 there was a thriving, cohesive Aboriginal community of approximately 400 people. The whole site was gradually acquired by the AHC, providing affordable rental accommodation to Aboriginal families next to a major railway station and within 3 kms from the Sydney's Central Business District.

In the 1990s, however, an active and highly visible drug market operated on The Block. Heroin, particularly, and its related criminal activity swept through the area systematically destroying the social cohesion of the community. Many of the strong families moved out of the area and within a decade, The Block became a location for drug dealers, alcoholics and kids heavily involved in substance abuse and crime. Several of the original terrace houses were used as drug houses or shooting galleries. Many became condemned and as a result were demolished.

Over the past three decades, the AHC has attempted to redevelop The Block through a variety of housing plans. In close consultation with the Aboriginal community, these plans have a common theme of community – each included affordable and safe housing, health, education and cultural facilities, and promoted Aboriginal enterprise and employment. Many of the recommendations and strategies from the various AHC plans in the 1980s, the 1990s, the 2001 AHC Social Plan (prepared by myself) and the 2004 Concept Plans (prepared by Merrima Aboriginal Design Unit) were not implemented mainly due

to lack of funding and resources, and government neglect and inaction.<sup>1</sup> As all levels of government continued to ignore the escalating social problems, the drug trade intensified and interest in community plans slackened.

Historically, government has consistently obstructed the AHC plans, perniciously undermining Aboriginal self-determination, governance and its leadership by blocking various proposals to redevelop the site. The AHC has experienced systematic denial of government support structures, exclusion from area plans and withdrawal of funding. Not only has the government set a course to destroy any systematic approach to sustain and strengthen this community, but also proposed new planning mechanisms to reduce the residential development potential of The Block, increased political power to compulsorily acquire control over Aboriginal land, and devised conditions of funding agreements that could potentially disempower Aboriginal people, removing them from control over all but a small portion of their lives.

However, the AHC has held firm on its vision to create a better environment for the Aboriginal community. The latest proposal for the redevelopment of The Block is the Pemulwuy Project which provides a mixed-use development including commercial uses, recreational and cultural facilities, and family-oriented housing. The original concept plans were provided by Aboriginal architect Dillon Kombumerri in 2004, with the final plans and development application prepared by architects Julie Cracknell, Peter Lonergan and Leane Senzamicic in 2005/06. A collaborative effort with a team of urban professionals offering pro-bono services, the final project application was submitted in October 2007 creating the first comprehensive, mixed-use development plan to be submitted for The Block after more than thirty-five years of plans. The government has finally withdrawn its opposition to the project and has shown support through waiving the development application fees.

The Pemulwuy Project is approximately 40 percent residential and 40 percent retail and commercial, with 20 percent devoted to cultural, community and recreational activities. The spatial organisation shows the six three-storey, multi-unit apartment buildings arranged around a series of gardens, forming a single block bounded by Eveleigh, Louis, Caroline and Vine Streets. Designed to be able to be sold as strata-titled units, the variety of housing includes: twelve four-bedroom dwellings on the lower ground level, twenty-four two-bedroom units on the upper ground level, twenty-two three-bedroom dwellings and four one-bedroom apartments, with terraced private open space. The development proposes a cultural centre at the northern end to house an Aboriginal Elders Community Centre, with 46 percent of the site to be private outdoor space. The new Redfern Gym will be at the southern end of the development, having existed on The Block for twenty-five years. The plan also includes a health and respite centre, a commercial development in association with the Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS), providing respite care for non-residential patients and family members who travel to Sydney to visit the AMS or other Sydney hospitals. The development includes open space and mixed-use

buildings for commercial and cultural activities, including an art gallery and ancillary retail. The project will be delivered as a staged development, with the concept master plan for the whole site being followed by subsequent individual project applications for specific sites.

The Pemulwuy Project is designed to be economically self-sufficient and offers to rejuvenate the Redfern area. As Cracknell and Lonergan Architects wrote in the project description:

*The construction of this premium-quality mixed-use development will increase commercial and residential densities around Redfern Waterloo, and in particular the transport hub of Redfern station, in a manner consistent with the Sydney Metropolitan Strategy. It includes vital employment-generating commercial activity and medium-density family-style housing, which is urgently required for Aboriginal people close to the city.<sup>2</sup>*

The AHC redevelopment project offers an opportunity to challenge how we think about Aboriginal community-based planning. There are valuable lessons to consider – Indigenous participation in the planning process, the central role of the community in devising strategies, effective collaboration with urban professionals and the need for an enabling environment that allows effective Indigenous planning structures to be developed.

The Pemulwuy Project is a prime example of applying Indigenous Knowledge in the design and development process and finding relevant and realistic solutions to the development problems on The Block. In essence, the AHC planning process has placed Aboriginal knowledge and values at the forefront and has empowered Indigenous people and capabilities in the planning of their community. The lessons from the AHC planning process is significant for Indigenous people who are fighting back against the invasion of their communities by mainstream planning policies and political agendas.

Angela Pitts is a PhD candidate at the University of Sydney in the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning. She is also a social planner with the Aboriginal Housing Company and author of the national and international award-winning AHC Community Social Plan. Copyright for this article remains with the author.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Some of the AHC plans include: the 1973 Plans prepared by architects Col James and Richard Jermyn, the 1986 Redevelopment Plans prepared by Wendy Sarkissian & Associate Planners; the 1992 Revised Strategic Plan prepared by architects Jan Felton & Shelley Indyk; the 2001 AHC Community Social Plan prepared by social planner, Angela Pitts; and the 2004 Concept Plans prepared by the Merrima Aboriginal Design Unit - Dillon Kombumerri Principal Architect.

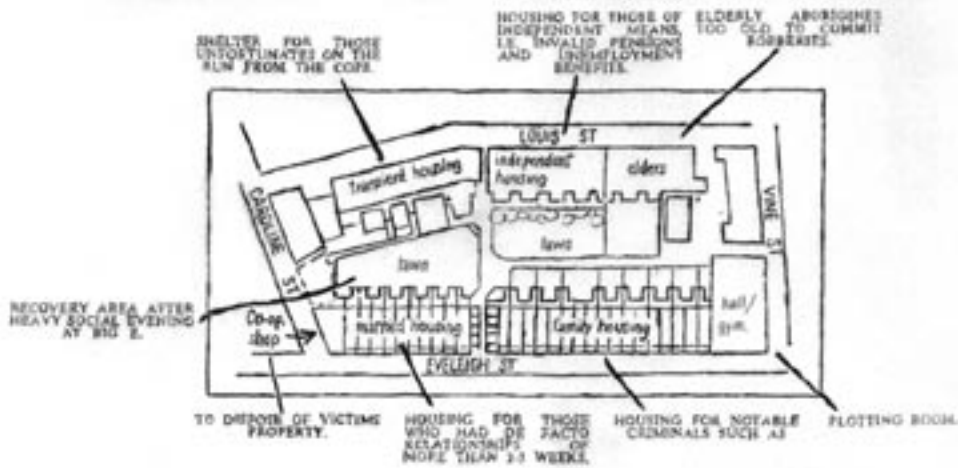
<sup>2</sup> Cracknell & Lonergan, The Pemulwuy Project Description, October 2007.





By October 1974, ten houses had been stripped and one was in the final stages of renovation, thanks to diverse groups like the Self-Help Building Crew, comprised of Maori, Aboriginal and white carpenters, painters and laborers. Col James recalls picking up property cheap at auction because "as soon as all these big black people walked in the bidding dropped substantially." The resulting indigenous ownership of inner-city land challenged a history of Aboriginal people being pushed to the outskirts of towns.

THE MEANING OF THE TERMS USED IN THE ABORIGINAL HOUSING SCHEME



In October 1973 this racist version of the Redfern Aboriginal Housing scheme hung in the local detective's office, a harbinger of increasing persecution in the neighborhood. When Bob Bellar arrived at the police station to help his wife Kaye, who'd been arrested, her wedding ring was torn off and thrown at him because of his heritage. Koors were hauled from their homes, beaten and charged with trespass on private property—their own. In the 1990s "drug-related crime" led to 24-hour police harassment of residents, and by 2002 these efforts coincided with corporate ones to clear Aboriginals from The Block in favor of private development. When Redfern teen T.J. Hickey was fatally impaled on a fence after a police chase in February 2004, long-simmering racial tensions erupted in a riot.

# PUSH AND PULL

## A FURNITURE COMEDY FOR HANS HOFMANN

### Instructions :

Anyone can find or make one or more rooms of any shape, size proportion and color -- Then furnish them perhaps, maybe paint some things or everything.

Everyone else can come in and, if the room(s) are furnished, they also can arrange them, accommodating themselves as they see fit.

Each day things will change.

. . . . .

### Points of View :

Think of subletting someone's apartment. How can you get rid of the fellow when he is in every piece of furniture, every arrangement? Do you like living with him? Imagine it unfurnished. What would you do -- buy some things (if so, what style?), scrounge some off the streets, ask your relatives or friends (which will remind you of them...)? Perhaps live without furniture, instead. As for the question of style, why not have everything totally unrelated to everything else -- shape, color, period, arrangement, etc.? Can it be done? Do you like candy-canes? Then why not paint everything in stripes? Or, better, like twelve different types of candy-canes? Maybe dots, billions of them, baby dots, mommy dots, daddy dots, pink, brown, snot-green, white, orange, shocking-red, da-glo blue -- all over everything, floors, ceilings inside of drawers, in the sink, on the silverware, on the sheets and pillowcases ... Do you prefer round rooms, tall ones, hexagonal ones, caves, lean-to's rooms without windows, skylights? Suppose you liked eating off the floor (some people are that clean, I'm told) -- it could be carpeted with food all the times. Design it like a Persian rug and you could eat your way through the designs, right across the room, making new ones behind you as you went along. Maybe, after all, formality is the thing. Then carefully choose a big chair, a little one, a bigger table and a very small lamp, and push them and pull them around until they make a significant composition. The significance is determined by having both a calculated and an intuited reciprocity obtain between every push in one direction, and every pull acting against it in another direction. Significance may be achieved within either a structure of symmetries, in which each push-pull relation is made up of near-equals; or a structure of asymmetries, where the push and pull relation is realized from near-equivalences. But one caution: Don't sit on the chairs, because this will destroy the composition. Unless, of course, you once again start pushing and pulling everything around until it works right. Repeat when you leave. Consider whether or not you're a red-head and dressed in Kelly-green. Are you fat, fatter than the table? In that case, quickly change your clothes if the small chair's color doesn't correspond; and also lose some weight. What about your kids? And their toy ducks to be considered equivalent to one medium sized violet dress (softened by black hair, brown eyes and leopardskin bag). Now these relationships will be seen to exactly balance the combined density of the orange large chair, the brownish mantle ornament and the beige stripe running around the baseboard. You mustn't neglect the spaces in between the furniture and how they figure in the total space. They are, in fact, "solids" of another order, and each negative area is

colored and qualified by the punctuating components (tables, chairs, etc.) around it. The inter-activity between negatives and positives, furthermore, may be so equalized as to produce a higher neutrality than the biases of the separate elements. Properly handled, a silence of perfect ineloquence will result. On the other hand, the positives or negatives may be accented, producing a ruler-ruled relation. This, in turn, may be enhanced or neutralized by closed-field or open-field concepts: closing a door or opening it, for instance, will contain or break the boundary of the structure. Now since these generalizations are made concrete by the frequent occurrence of children's toys being left in any ordinary room, it is only necessary to stay out of the room when the toys are there and vice-versa. However, don't suppose the conclusion here is "each to his own". The further question is "who knows how to compose forms?". If "form" is now too much for you, why not chuck it all and take the pure leap? What is a "pure leap"? (The word "comedy" in the title of this Environment isn't necessarily humorous - though it may be - I had in mind Blazac's "Human Comedy".) Instead of "forms" try simply and idea like: rooms full of people contrasted with empty rooms; one, maybe a hockshop, the other, a monk's cell....A sunset-colored room against a blue-Monday one ... Or, the "room" made by your own feelings wherever you decide to sit down in the woods. Aren't these "forms" also? Is the nude woman on a bed a better form than a coverlet on a bed? Which is more personal? If the forms of the furniture express "you", what are you going to do about others? When visitors come and you draw up chairs for them, don't you express "them" a little? What happens to the room? Who is right? Should rooms be lived in or stared at. I have heard of some people wh have antique chairs you mustn't sit on because they'll collapse. Don't move that ash tray because it expresses Daddy so well, just where it is. But maybe the smell of mushroom soup cooking will heighten the color-chords on the walls, particularly the candy-cane stripes. I find that Rhythm-and-Blues on the radio goes fine with soundless newscasts on TV. Try it out if you really want to compose your room. Did you ever think of arranging rooms for darkness, that is for night time when you go to bed and see only dim shadows? A room for feelies only. Wet surfaces, rough, sandpapery objects, other things as soft as foam rubber to run your toe into getting to the bathroom at 4 AM, silks slithering across your cheek, very large solids like cedar chests for Braille identification. This should be a thoughtful problem, and it would develop all the senses, except the eyes. How long does it take to develop artistic senses? Why not ask an interior decorator?

. . . . .

If they wish, exhibitors may hereafter add their own "points of view" on the blank cardboards included in this crate, using black enamel and brush, as indicated. This way the crate will change by additions as the Environment will change by interpretation and alteration.

- Allan Kaprow, April 1963

Score for PUSH AND PULL: A FURNITURE COMEDY FOR HANS HOFMANN reproduced with permission:  
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THE EXHIBITION INCLUDES A RE-ENACTMENT OF ALLAN KAPROW'S PUSH AND PULL:  
A FURNITURE COMEDY FOR HANS HOFFMAN (1963) AT LOCKSMITH PROJECT SPACE.

# The Politics of Spatial Justice

Ava Bromberg is an urban planning scholar, spacemaker, and student of cities. Her research and practice concern creative economies, public and social goods, responsible development and community-driven planning. She is a co-founder of Mess Hall, an experimental storefront cultural center in Chicago, co-organizer of the Just Space(s) exhibition and symposium series, and co-editor of *Belltown Paradise / Making Their Own Plans*. Below are two interviews with Ava Bromberg.

AN INTERVIEW BETWEEN NATO THOMPSON  
AND AVA BROMBERG

**Nato Thompson (NT):** Could you describe some of the organizing principles behind Mess Hall and what you learned as it has evolved?

**Ava Bromberg (AB):** Mess Hall is an experimental cultural space operating out of a storefront in the Roger's Park neighborhood on the far north side of Chicago. We started in the summer of 2003 with eight "keyholders" and a few basic founding principles. We wanted to extend our landlord's initial act of generosity—he gives us use of the storefront rent-free—to build up a non-commercial space where people would be encouraged to share their skills, ideas, food, and personal and professional surpluses of all sorts. We agreed never to ask for donations at the door or

"pass the hat." From the beginning we wanted Mess Hall to be a place for activities that had nowhere else to go in Chicago. People continue to propose programs all the time—we host exhibitions, discussions with peripatetic scholars, appreciations of hardcore music, film screenings, workshops to repurpose old clothing and other events of varied origin.

**NT:** Could you define the term "spatial justice" and where it comes from?

**AB:** The term spatial justice is fundamentally related to an idea introduced by Henri Lefebvre and extended by Edward Soja and others, namely that space isn't "out there" somewhere or a static container in which we live—space is actively produced and reproduced through our choices, and the social relations that inspire them. In other words, our neighborhoods, cities, working environments—and our internal environments, that

sense of what is possible we've been talking about—are constantly constructed and reconstructed. What does that have to do with justice? I think it is important to understanding that justice- like space- is never simply handed out or given; both are socially produced, experienced, and contested on constantly shifting social, political, economic, and geographical terrains. That means that justice—if it is to be concretely achieved, experienced, and reproduced, must be engaged on spatial as well as social terms.

Spatial justice builds on notions of social justice by forcing us to be more specific about what we mean by justice. With a spatial frame we can better understand where we stand, not just geographically, but at other materially and immaterially spatial scales of lived and perceived experience (inside our bodies, our race and gender, our neighborhood, national borders impacted by transnational trade agreements etc.). A spatial frame allows us to see, for example, how investment decisions perpetuate geographic inequalities. Moreover, I think the usefulness is in understanding this is a point of departure for demanding—and creating—something different. What's interesting to me about spatial justice is that it isn't only about arriving at a better analysis of what is wrong, but also using this spatial consciousness to do something about it. We have to acknowledge that we all have a role to play in producing justice, even if we have different levels of power, and the concept of spatial justice brings that into focus.

The term still needs to be adequately theorized and its applications as a framework for critical practice—for artists, organizers and scholars whose work engages questions of justice – needs to be explored. Edward Soja has a book called *Seeking Spatial Justice* coming out in 2010 from University of Minnesota Press, which will contribute to that discussion. In any case, I think spatial justice could be a very powerful framework through which people who don't have lots of monetary-power but are nonetheless impacted by it's movement can a) create political pressure and demand rights to intervene in development processes that don't provide for them, and most importantly b) begin to (re)produce just spaces with their work. The more precise analysis that a spatial frame can provide gets us rather quickly into complex questions about how we get our institutions to better work in service of people, and what we mean by "public."

**NT:** I am particularly intrigued with the crossover in analysis between the practice of the Situationists (not simply their walks, but their belief in space and the city as an important force in their being) and the concomitant artistic practices thriving today with the ongoing interest in cultural geography and spatial practices led by Henri Lefebvre, Michele DeCerteau Edward Soja, Rebecca Solnit, Ruthi Gilmore and others. I see a productive conversation taking place between the study of spatial politics and the performance of bodies in space. It almost feels like an emerging field in and of itself.

**AB:** I agree. And at such a moment of convergence, there's a chance to take the best from each of these fields' methodologies, to really learn how to practice theory, to think about how we stimulate creativity (a loaded, but appropriate term) more broadly, and what it means to "train" artists and citizens to remake meaning and practice politics. To see that we all can choose to continue unjust cycles or being making just spaces—and economies—in our own lives and work. Practicing theory is what seems to me to be the imperative of this particular crossover. I definitely consider my work operating at this juncture, building on what has already

been done and negotiating different institutional expectations to explore what these approaches have to offer each other in a more broadly conceived practice. But I am also keenly interested in acting, in producing just spaces and just economies, to perform sure, but also embody and activate this shift.

**NT:** Lets discuss the term "art". Both of us have a tenuous relationship with the term "art" and are definitely skeptical of its connotations. Nonetheless, there is a tradition of the poetic or ambiguous that allows the term art to separate itself from more utilitarian objects? How do you see use the term "art" in relationship to your practice?

**AB:** On the level of daily experience I think of art as what expands the horizon of what people conceive to be possible. So for me—and I think for you too—we acknowledge that the context for making, experiencing, and transforming art is absolutely bigger than the industrial complex that assigns meaning and trades in its abstract value; in that world where the resurgence of painting is rather predictable, we are free to drink chardonnay and have the occasional transformative experience. We know that a whole world of work is produced and reproduced by the spaces, institutional frameworks, and financing that contain it. We don't even have to talk about that (unless you want to). Though I'll add that a) interesting work gets made with that money sometimes, b) I think the ethics come in not with whose money one takes, but what one does with it, and c) I've been moved to tears in a museum. So I guess, to start this part of the conversation, I want to decouple the term 'art' from that framing device and ways it can be employed to justify a certain kind of disengagement with the wider world. Instead I will suggest that what you and I and so many others we admire are working with—our frame, lets say—is all social life. I'm looking for a more descriptive way to say "everything." And to be clear, that's not "everything is art" but rather "everything is the frame in which art shows up and becomes meaningful." I've always been drawn to Heidegger's definition in "Origin of the Work of Art" where he says a work of art creates and exists in a clearing, an opening up where a society shows itself to itself. This can happen in a painting or a book, but it can also be lots of other things operating in lots of other contexts.

Anyway, whatever art becomes when you embrace the whole world as it is, warts and all, with mysteries of the universe, pain, suffering, private gardens, sunglasses, McDonalds, motherhood, sandcastles, cigarettes, etc. I think art, all of the sudden, is needed everywhere in a really profound way. To open up horizons for new possibilities in oneself and others. To remind us to play. The catalyst can be poetic; what it inspires can be utilitarian and visa versa!

On the level of my daily experience (and what I would call my practice) I continue to work to expand my own horizons, and to work in ways that make expansion available to others. That's just what happened to my practice, and why I ended up seeking an advanced degree in urban planning in order to do my (art)work, to be a better physical and discursive spacemaker, and a more efficient researcher and writer. I've found what I really treasure and keep close about art (understood in this most open sense, decoupled from its reifying institutions, but happening sometimes inside them)—is it an experimental storefront cultural center in Chicago's open gaze, the ultimate transdisciplinary position, the necessity to communicate.

*Posted on the Creative Time website, February 2008.*

**Zanny Begg (ZB):** I am curious about forms of property, land tenure, and collective ownership that develop urban communities for collective good, without the stratification between rich and poor that usually accompanies the process of gentrification. How do you break the cycle of private land ownership to make space for non-economic encounters?

**Ava Bromberg (AB):** First, we should talk a little bit about property. I think it's important to remember that what we mean by property has changed and been reinterpreted throughout history, and is different across cultures. In United States law, property is not actually a thing, but a bundle of rights, a series of relationships – rights to do certain things, to possess or dispossess something, a house, for example. Indigenous cultures, of course, have entirely other concepts of property.

Lately, I'm thinking a lot about how we define and support what is "common" and how we expand that. I've been reading a lot of the work of legal theorist Carol Rose, who makes some really interesting arguments about the commons that there isn't space to get into here. Rose makes important points about the role of persuasion and narrative in constructing the collective belief in (and support of) the regime of individual property. Her work suggests something we know in our hearts: that this system of individual property stands because collectively allow it to; we have been persuaded, and collectively uphold it as the only way. Most importantly, with persuasive enough terms, strong narratives, compelling cases, we can make other systems so; we can change norms. This means that the work of pursuing sustainable other models includes shifting the conversation, changing the culture, and developing customs that make collective ownership viable. Now is the perfect time for that.

To speak more directly to your question without giving a lot of detail, I think land trusts, especially those that build or preserve affordable housing, are the most well developed mechanisms for taking land off the speculative market and preserving them for a common good. It isn't a perfect solution, but it is a really strong model. At the moment I'm looking into condominiums, cooperatives, and land trusts because of how they, respectively, pay for common space and infrastructure, share equity and governance, and take land off the speculative market. I am pursuing a hybrid model that can build on the strengths and cover the weaknesses of each. Most examples focus on housing, but I'm particularly interested in developing applications for commercial space. I think a well-developed neighborhood solidarity economy could support non-economic spaces for encounter among the places you might get your groceries or do your laundry. This would provide an engine for neighborhood jobs, curiosities, and social space while generating capital to purchase surrounding lots and take them off the speculative market as well. I'm working on that now.

Most of all, I think your question is something for neighbours to discuss, because we have to figure out what that better system looks like and build it together. It is not necessarily something that already exists, and even if it does exist, history shows that every time it happens requires collective effort, agreement, and willingness to create structures that share power and equity and deal well with conflict. I think that dismantling the mechanisms of gentrification will have as much to do with collective governance (being together and sharing power) as it will with collective ownership (sharing equity). These new forms of

ownership will be inseparable from the self-institutions that govern them – both will have to be flexible and durable enough to stand the test of time.

**ZB:** Ironically artists, who have been described elsewhere in this book as the avant-garde of gentrification, are part of the problem moving into neglected and economically underdeveloped areas raising their cultural capital and eventually their real estate value. Can art projects provide a genuine alternative to gentrification or are they caught forever in this trap of being one step ahead of the eventual greed of the developers?

**AB:** I think it is important to remember that artists are but one of many groups in a city that need low rents. Artists can be operating, and organizing, in solidarity with the senior citizens, independent youth, women, single moms, immigrants, and indigenous populations with whom they share a neighborhood. When speculative markets are strong enough to displace communities, everyone is uprooted. Some people end up with more options than others.

What can art projects do? Well, it depends what they want to do. An art project might create space for productive encounters among the different communities that make up a neighborhood. They might include media projects that can make public how the fates of these different groups are intertwined. Can artists—or art projects—create ways for everyone to get together on their own terms, for the solidarity, the we're-in-this-togetherness to develop? Not all artists are interested in this. Not all neighbours are interested in this. But this is, in some ways, a starting point for developing the relations that make collective ownership and governance possible that I was talking about just before. Ironically, ownership stakes and strong feelings of attachment to place and people are likely to be the only thing that will enable folks to choose to say no to a developer who wants to buy them out.

A diverse coalition could also build the political will to pressure local governments to make it a lot harder for speculative development to happen. That is a tall order in a system where development dollars bankroll lots of local political campaigns, but we can't surrender all the power to development interests—land use decisions are very political.

Otherwise, I could imagine a campaign around the right to housing, not just for artists, but for everyone. That changes the dynamic. And talking about a right to housing means we have to talk about public housing. Public housing is much maligned in the United States (where there is no right to housing, and massive populations of unhoused persons) even on the so-called "left;" no one likes to talk about public housing. But again, with adequate political pressure, public housing could be reclaimed and reconstituted as a viable way to make sure that there will always be low rent places for those who have low rent lives by choice or necessity.

Lastly, there is of course, the chance that we all seize the opportunity created by the collapse of the global banking system and speculative real estate bubbles to make the cultural shift that enables new cycles of relations (i.e. whether towards collective ownership, or a right to housing) to take root. It's an optimistic position, but it's certainly the perfect moment for optimism, and for getting a hold of as many cheap or free empty spaces as possible. Art projects could certainly play a role in that. I sure hope they try!



# Basic Program of the Bureau of Unitary Urbanism

ATTILA KOTANYI AND RAUL VANEIGEM, SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL.

## 1. NOTHINGNESS OF URBANISM AND NOTHINGNESS OF THE SPECTACLE

Urbanism doesn't exist; it is only an "ideology" in Marx's sense of the word. Architecture does exist, like Coca-Cola: though coated with ideology, it is a real production, falsely satisfying a falsified need. Urbanism is comparable to the advertising about Coca-Cola — pure spectacular ideology. Modern capitalism, which organizes the reduction of all social life to a spectacle, is incapable of presenting any spectacle other than that of our own alienation. Its urbanistic dream is its masterpiece.

## 2. CITY PLANNING AS CONDITIONING AND FALSE PARTICIPATION

The development of the urban milieu is the capitalist domestication of space. It represents the choice of one particular materialization, to the exclusion of other possibilities. Like aesthetics, whose course of decomposition it is going to follow, it can be considered as a rather neglected branch of criminology. What characterizes it at the "city planning" level — as opposed to its merely architectural level — is its insistence on popular consent, on individual integration into its bureaucratic production of conditioning.

All this is imposed by means of a blackmail of utility, which hides the fact that this architecture and this conditioning are really useful only in reinforcing reification. Modern capitalism dissuades people from making any criticism of architecture with the simple argument that they need a roof over their heads, just as television is accepted on the grounds that they need information and entertainment. They are made to overlook the obvious fact that this information, this entertainment and this kind of dwelling place are not made for them, but without them and against them.

City planning must be understood as a society's field of publicity-propaganda, i.e. as the organization of participation in something in which it is impossible to participate.

## 3. TRAFFIC CIRCULATION, SUPREME STAGE OF CITY PLANNING

Traffic circulation is the organization of universal isolation. As such, it constitutes the major problem of modern cities. It is the opposite of encounter: it absorbs the energies that could otherwise be devoted to encounters or to any sort of participation. Spectacles compensate for the participation that is no longer possible. Within this spectacular society one's status is determined by one's residence and mobility (personal vehicles). You don't

live somewhere in the city, you live somewhere in the hierarchy. At the summit of this hierarchy the ranks can be ascertained by the degree of mobility. Power is objectively expressed in the necessity of being present each day at more and more places (business dinners, etc.) further and further removed from each other. A VIP could be defined as someone who has appeared in three different capitals in the course of a single day.

## 4. DISTANCIATION FROM URBAN SPECTACLE

The spectacle system that is in the process of integrating the population manifests itself both as organization of cities and as permanent information network. It is a solid framework designed to reinforce the existing conditions of life. Our first task is to enable people to stop identifying with their surroundings and with model patterns of behavior. This is inseparable from making possible free mutual recognition in a few initial zones set apart for human activity. People will still be obliged for a long time to accept the era of reified cities. But the attitude with which they accept it can be changed immediately. We must encourage their skepticism toward those spacious and brightly colored kindergartens, the new dormitory cities of both East and West. Only a mass awakening will pose the question of a conscious construction of the urban environment.



## 5. AN INDIVISIBLE FREEDOM

The main achievement of contemporary city planning is to have made people blind to the possibility of what we call unitary urbanism, namely a living critique of this manipulation of cities and their inhabitants, a critique fueled by all the tensions of everyday life. A living critique means setting up bases for an experimental life where people can come together to create their own lives on terrains equipped to their ends. Such bases cannot be reservations for “leisure” activities separated from the society. No spatio-temporal zone is completely separable. The whole society exerts continual pressure even on its present vacation “reservations.” Situationist bases will exert pressure in the opposite direction, acting as bridgeheads for an invasion of everyday life as a whole. Unitary urbanism is the contrary of a specialized activity; to accept a separate urbanistic domain is already to accept the whole urbanistic lie and the falsehood permeating the whole of life.

Urbanism promises happiness. It shall be judged accordingly. The coordination of artistic and scientific means of denunciation must lead to a complete denunciation of existing conditioning.

## 6. THE LANDING

All space is already occupied by the enemy, which has even reshaped its basic laws, its geometry, to its own purposes. Authentic urbanism will appear when the absence of this occupation is created in certain zones. What we call construction starts there. It can be clarified by the positive void concept developed by modern physics. Materializing freedom means beginning by appropriating a few patches of the surface of a domesticated planet.

## 7. THE ILLUMINATION OF DETOURNEMENT

The basic practice of the theory of unitary urbanism will be the transcription of the whole theoretical lie of urbanism, detoured for the purpose of de-alienation. We have to constantly defend ourselves from the poetry of the bards of conditioning — to jam their messages, to turn their rhythms inside out.

## 8. CONDITIONS OF DIALOGUE

Functional means practical. The only thing that is really practical is the resolution of our fundamental problem: our self-realization (our escape from the system of isolation). This and nothing else is useful and utilitarian. Everything else is

nothing but by-products of the practical, mystifications of the practical.

## 9. RAW MATERIAL AND TRANSFORMATION

The Situationist destruction of present conditioning is already at the same time the construction of situations. It is the liberation of the inexhaustible energies trapped within a petrified daily life. With the advent of unitary urbanism, present city planning (that geology of lies) will be replaced by a technique for defending the permanently threatened conditions of freedom, and individuals — who do not yet exist as such — will begin freely constructing their own history.

## 10. END OF THE PREHISTORY OF CONDITIONING

We are not contending that people must return to some stage previous to the era of conditioning, but rather that they must go beyond it. We have invented the architecture and the urbanism that cannot be realized without the revolution of everyday life — without the appropriation of conditioning by everyone, its endless enrichment and fulfillment.



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What exactly is the mode of existence of social relationships? ...The study of space offers an answer according to which the social relations of production have a social existence to the extent that they have a spatial existence; they project themselves into a space, becoming inscribed there, and in the process producing that space itself - Henri Lefebvre

*There Goes the Neighbourhood* was the ironic chorus to the 1992 *Body Count* song which lamented the invasion of the once poor (and Black) into the neighbourhood of the rich (and white). But an alternative destruction of "The Neighbourhood" can happen when the poor get pushed out of their local community as part of the process of gentrification. This issue is particularly relevant for the suburb of Redfern, an inner city suburb of Sydney which has been home for a large working class and Indigenous community, and which is undergoing a process of rapid development and change.

The Block, Redfern, has been described as the "Black Heart" of Australia and occupies a unique place within Sydney's urban landscape as a centre for the Indigenous community. The suburb was once a strong working class neighbourhood and was the starting point for the 1917 general strike for a shorter working week - but in the 1980s the rail yards were closed down and have now been transformed into a new cultural centre, CarriageWorks. Redfern grabbed headlines in 2004 after riots erupted when police killed a 17 year old Aboriginal boy as he was chased by police cars on his push-bike. In that same year the Redfern/Waterloo Authority was established - a special government committee to oversee the rapid development and gentrification of the area. Redfern thus involves a complex, contested and controversial overlapping use of urban space.

*There Goes the Neighborhood* begins with a close study of Redfern before expanding into international examples to provide a detailed exploration of how the phenomenon of gentrification is altering the relationship between democracy and demography around the world. This book has been published in tandem with an exhibition of the same name and many of the contributions come from participating artists in the exhibition: Brenda L. Croft (Australia), 16beaver (USA), Daniel Boyd (Australia), Temporary Services (USA), Jakob Jakobsen (Denmark), Lisa Kelly (Australia), SquatSpace (Australia), Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro (Germany/Australia), Evil Brothers (Australia), You Are Here (Australia), Michael Rakowitz (USA), Miklos Erhardt and Little Warsaw (Hungary), Bijari (Brazil) and Democracia (Spain). The book also includes contributions from key thinkers about the complex life of cities such as the Situationists, Mike Davis, Brian Holmes, Gary Foley and Elizabeth Farrelly.

*There Goes The Neighbourhood* is edited by Keg de Souza and Zanny Begg from You Are Here, a Sydney based art collective which focuses on social and spatial mapping.

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