

Understanding

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Identity, Place and Possession

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Understanding

Identity, Place and Possession

Territoriality:

**UNDERSTANDING TERRITORIALITY:  
IDENTITY, PLACE AND POSSESSION**

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UNDERSTANDING  
TERRITORIALITY

FABRICA  
BRIGHTON'S CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART



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# Foreword

Understanding Territoriality: Identity, Place and Possession was a two-year partnership project co-funded by the Creative Europe programme of the European Union. It brought together four organisations working in the fields of visual arts and contemporary design: Fabrica in Brighton, UK, Netwerk in Aalst, Belgium, Cittadellarte – Fondazione Pistoletto in Biella, Italy and Public Room Centre for Design in Skopje, Macedonia.

Through a series of specially commissioned exhibitions, artist residencies and engagement activities the partners have explored how human territorial behaviours play out at the personal, local and general level, tried to understand the tensions these create and how these tensions challenge the sustainability of the nation state and the European Union.

Through its wide-ranging and publicly accessible programme Understanding Territoriality has sought to open up the debate on this subject by involving the participation of young people, asylum seekers and refugees, businesses, activists, artists, designers and other cultural workers. It has also sought to highlight the ways in which individuality, and local (or tribal) distinctiveness can build a wider sense of 'togetherness' and co-operation, rather than fuel dissonance and violent conflict.

The following texts are reflections and propositions that respond to these questions and themes, and reflect the partners' learning over the past two years.

# Terra - Terror -

## INTRODUCTION

by **Pascal Gielen**

*'... today, all politics is about real estate. Postmodern politics is essentially a matter of land grabs, on a local as well as a global scale. Whether you think of the question of Palestine, the settlements and the camps, or of the politics of raw materials and extraction; whether you think of ecology (and the rainforests) or the problems of federalism, citizenship and immigration, or whether it is a question of gentrification in the great cities as well as in the bidonvilles, the favelas and townships, and of course the movement of the landless – today everything is about land.'*

Territory

Frederic Jameson

*'...the urban, the environment and the question of territorial identity all are dimensions of the monotopic Europe coined around a specific notion of mobility as zero friction.'*

Ole Jensen & Tim Richardson

*'A cynic is a man who knows the price of everything, and the value of nothing.'*

Oscar Wilde

When, on 7 December 1972, Blue Marble—the first clear photograph of the whole Earth—was shown, we immediately understood its message: this is the territory. Although it had long since been proven that the Earth was round and finite, it took an image to let that finiteness sink into our collective consciousness. From then on the Earth was indeed understood as a territory: a well-defined and limited terrain and the only one to inhabit and to farm, at least for now. It is no coincidence that ecological movements rapidly gathered momentum in the early 1970s.

What may be a historical coincidence, or not, is that in exactly the same period neoliberalism began to gain popularity, after twenty years of preparing for it, between 1940 and 1960. Because of a unilateral decision by the United States to no longer tie its currency to gold, the famous Bretton Woods system was dismantled between 1971 and 1973. Inflation of first prices and then wages broke the then dominant Keynesian model, while the student movement demanding more freedom in the late 1960s had made at least some of those students receptive to anarcho-capitalism.<sup>1</sup> In any case, it was the alumni of the early 1970s who, in the 1980s, became the neo-managers, policymakers and controllers of real estate. In short, the beginning of the 1970s marked the start of a bipolar 'terror about territory'. This terror came from two completely different spheres.

<sup>1</sup> Nick Srnicek & Alex Williams, *Inventing the future: Postcapitalism and a World without Work*. London & New York: Verso, 2016, p. 63



On the one side there was the ecological movement, which, from a growing awareness, revolted against the destructive exploitation of our finite planet; on the other side, free rein was given to an urge for accumulation and expansion that, by contrast, encouraged the excessive exploitation and privatisation of real estate. For the record, from its Latin roots the word ‘terror’ means fright or panic, a fear that is mainly caused by a threat to one’s territory, either mental or physical. This is an interesting finding: the effect of terror is primarily placed on the receiving end. Terror first of all points to a state of mind and only subsequently to the violence or regime that causes the terror. A state of terror is therefore, in fact, a psychological condition, a feeling of dread, the real cause of which may never materialise or even be non-existent.

The triumvirate, terra, terror and territory, seems to define today’s general climate of fear. According to ecological movements we are no longer on the brink of disaster, but well past that because they fear, with reason, that we have already exhausted or simply used up the limited territory at our disposal. CEOs in turn fear — increasingly so, alongside governments — that economic growth will halt and that they will not be able to accumulate even more, that they will run out of available, finite territory, as it becomes occupied by others. However diametrically opposed both movements are, their state of mind is similar: a general panic. Even their solutions run parallel: both try to reclaim and control the territory. It is only when we ask how these parties would like to do so that all similarity ends.

### **THE WILD WEST**

It was on a bus trip from Hollywood to Santa Monica that an elderly gentleman — he was close to 90 — explained to me why Americans were so attached to their guns. According to him, it had a lot to do with the first-in-time, first-in-right principle, whereby the first white settlers of America’s West could claim farmland and gold mines as their own if they were the first to settle on a territory. As this gold and land rush gave rise to quite fierce competition and envy, we may assume that in 19th-century California, Texas and New Mexico, territory was not only frequently taken by force, but also had to be defended with guns.

Whether there was much actual shooting in those days is perhaps justifiably a subject of debate today. The rough history of these parts owes its mythical status mostly to Hollywood films, as historical sources point to a not so wild Wild West.<sup>2</sup>

However, it is certainly true that at the time, the authorities could hardly enforce the monopoly of violence for such a vast territory. Local farmers, miners and militias had to maintain order and guard the land themselves, and they did so

<sup>2</sup> Robert Elickson, *Order without Law: How Neighbors Settle Disputes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991

also by using weapons. In the United States, the possession of firearms is thus synonymous with the right of ownership and even with personal autonomy or the right to self-determination, according to my elderly travel companion. This runs parallel to a deep-rooted distrust of the government. The government will after all never be able to efficiently enforce the monopoly of violence and therefore citizens can and should lend a hand. The point is that private possession of firearms in the first place served to define and defend one's own territory, thus making ownership and guns into twins that are joined at the hip.

The contrast with the original inhabitants of the new continent could hardly have been bigger. Although 'American Indians' did have property rules, they valued territory because of its practical value, in other words: to hunt and fish. This led to quite a few misunderstandings. The white newcomers who had settled on the land or had even bought it from the American Indians 'fair and square', were surprised and greatly annoyed when those same people on their hunting travels still raised their tents on the land that they had sold. So, one can own the land but one can never safeguard the territory from the use of the land. In that sense, land can indeed never be private property. Or, the territory may belong to someone, but the use of it belongs to no one and everyone. Also, the land can only be property as long as it is being used. To paraphrase Karl Marx<sup>3</sup>: for American Indians the territory has hardly any trade value, but only use value. Territory cannot be a commodity in that regard. These radically different views of territory and its use also meant that American Indians used weapons primarily to hunt animals and not, like the newcomers, to deter other people or hunt each other. An arrow cuts through the hunting ground, but a gun occupies the territory and then has to protect its borders. The economy of the former depends primarily on moving through the territory, while that of the latter is based on owning and expanding it. The former panic when they can no longer travel freely throughout the territory, the latter when the borders of their territory are threatened. Of course we mustn't turn "cowboys and Indians" or sedentary people and nomads into clichés, and indeed not romanticise the latter. Still, it is helpful to be conscious of the distinction, since how each one deals with territory can be radically different.

<sup>3</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital. Volume 1, II & III*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, [1867]1984

### **USE VALUE AND EXCHANGE VALUE OF TERRITORIES**

As long as we cannot exploit other planets besides our own, Blue Marble literally shows us the boundaries of the territory. We now realise that ownership and exploitation are finite. No matter how many more people join us on the globe, we can no longer 'expand' it. The territory is practically gone. Hence the panic on both sides, mentioned earlier. Ecologists are in distress because they see the sea level rising up to their necks and feel global warming breathing down it. In their turn, the capitalists live in fear of not being able to acquire more territory, unless they are sufficiently fast, flexible and in particular, they are competitive. And if they can no longer simply seize territory by force, governments are only too willing to do it for them these days. As the German economist Dirk Lohr states:

As soon as we start speaking about ‘globalisation’, we inevitably associate it with the excessive financial markets that are disconnected from the real economy. There is less public awareness of another type of globalisation that also involves the forced unification of institutions all over the world: the institution of private property and privatisation strategies. The driving forces behind this development are – besides the usual suspects, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization – governmental development organisations themselves.<sup>4</sup>

This privatisation rush is still often justified with an ancient legitimisation by John Locke.<sup>5</sup> He defended in particular the private appropriation of land by reasoning that collectively using it was economically less efficient. Those who promise ‘improvement, the enhancement of the land’s productivity’<sup>6</sup> therefore often more easily obtain a building permit, a change in zoning plans or environmental permit nowadays. In times of increasing scarcity (of territory and natural resources) there is of course much to be said for Locke’s argument to let the land be owned by those who can exploit it most productively and effectively. That is not only good for the economy but for the ecology as well. Careful handling of scarce resources—whether these are clean water, oil or, in time, clean air—would after all also be good for the environment. The problem, however, is that the English philosopher and his followers today do not see labour and productivity in those terms, as is evident from a more precise analysis of Locke’s statements about, again... the American Indians.

It appears that the issue for Locke has less to do with the activity of labour as such than with its profitable use. In calculating the value of the acre in America, for instance, he talks not about the Indian’s expenditure of effort, labour, but about the Indian’s failure to realize profit. The issue, in other words, is not the labour of a human being but the productivity of property, its exchange value, and its application to commercial profit.<sup>7</sup>

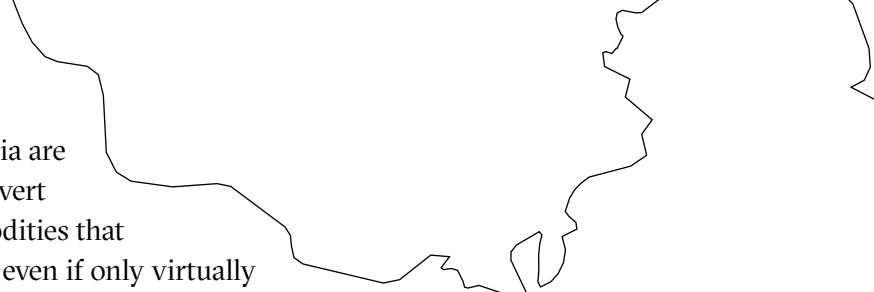
Locke’s theory was used to legitimise colonial and neo-colonial practices of appropriation, and today it is still being used and misused by city administrations and national or federal governments to defend their management, or rather mismanagement, of territory. Crucial in this is that, just as the enlightened philosopher did, juristic legitimations for the repurposing of territory place exchange value above use value. This has quite a few consequences for our valuation of territory. For real estate business, the urban infrastructure of houses, office buildings and transport is only relevant if it produces a surplus value. Investment decisions — often made in private-public cooperation — depend first and foremost upon the expected profit and therefore not upon the use value in terms of liveability, functionality or mobility. This use value is only relevant if it also raises the exchange value. One would be mistaken in thinking that this reasoning only applied to the physical territory, national heritage and natural resources. However infinite virtual space may appear, Internet capacity and connections are just as well in the first place bound to profitability and only in second instance to use values such as good communication or enrich-

<sup>4</sup> Dirk Löhr, ‘The Failure of Land Privatization: On the Need for New Development Policies’ In: Bollier, D. & Helfrich, S. (eds.) *The Wealth of the Commons. A World beyond Market & State*. Amherst: Levellers Press, 2012. p. 410

<sup>5</sup> John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government. An Essay Concerning the True Original, Extent, and End of Civil Government*. London: Awnsham Churchill, 1960

<sup>6</sup> Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism. A Longer View*. London & New York: Verso, 2002, p. 106

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* p. 111



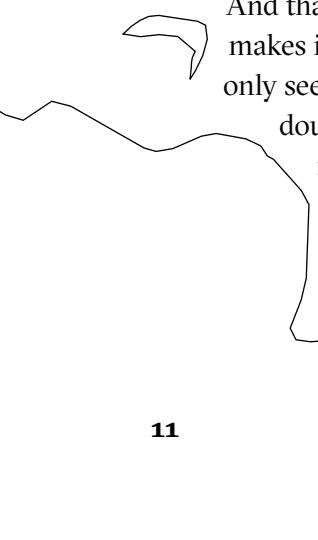
ing social interaction. The so-called social media are primarily commercial media: they literally convert social relations and even intimacy into commodities that generate exchange value and, hopefully, profit, even if only virtually so by going public. Facebook, Twitter or Flickr are hardly interested in the intrinsic value of communication and social relations, but all the more in their exchange value and stock value. In other words, in the seemingly endless space of the Internet, territorial laws also apply and territorial battles rage, as the www is only worldwide and this terra is finite, as Blue Marble has shown us. Once again, it is the sense of scarcity—partly of their own making, by the way—that drives inter-nauts and cyber capitalists to occupy as much territory as fast as they can (before others do). This also makes clear that if we could really escape from Blue Marble, if we could occupy a new planet, not in cyberspace but in real space, and thus be able to really expand the territory, we still would not be free from territorial struggles. Expanding the territory does not automatically mean that control over it would change. The former Wild West was initially seen as an immense territorial expansion, as a vast and seemingly endless landscape. So, real space could fall victim to the culture of grabbing just as easily as cyberspace. And for the record: grab culture cannot be simply reduced to individual misbehaviour or an immoral psyche. This pathology is structurally and collectively ingrained in everyone who sees territory as private property and exchange value. And it is hard not to do so in an age when just about everyone sings the praises of capital and the free market. The frantic fear of loss, the hysterical urge to have more and the blind faith in economic growth all point to a systemic error of which individual greed and grabbing behaviour are merely the superficial symptoms. This also implies that we cannot simply adjust views on territory, including territorial behaviour, by naming and shaming so-called anti-social individuals. This can only be achieved by a thorough overhaul of the management of the territory. And that means we have to intervene at the structural level.



### **ABSTRACT TERRITORY**

The idea that exchange value is an abstraction of use value is a classic Marxist insight.<sup>8</sup> Extending this and applying it to territory provides us with a special insight into our relationship to territory as well as management of it. Private property—and this also applies to governments if they manage their territory as such—has the special quality that it can be expressed in quantitative terms.

8 Marx



And that is exactly what exchange value is: the quantity of money that makes it possible to exchange the land for something else. If property is only seen this way (as is the case with, for example, real estate) it becomes doubly detached from the use of it. In the first place, one doesn't need to know the territory and its specific qualities in order to acquire it and perhaps resell it, just as speculative investors in a car factory don't need to know anything about how to build a car. Moreover, they don't need to have any empathy with the

production process, let alone with the people who work there and they don't even have to like the car brand. They may never buy one themselves. Likewise, the territory can remain utterly alien to its buyer, indeed this may even be better as it makes it easier to resell it at a profit without any sentimental drawbacks. This means — consequently — that the trader in land has a hard time grasping its limits or 'exhaustability'. In the long run, people who work the land or live in a house will sense, for example, that the ground is 'tired' or exhausted or that a house has become decrepit and worn-out. In other words: the use of something teaches us the limits of that use. Use value also refers to a sensitivity that unfolds only through the use of the territory. One develops a feeling for the land and a special ear for the creaks of one's house. Or, in more vernacular terms: people become one with the things they work on, make use of and live in. But the knowledge that is built through use and by material tangibility evaporates in exchange value. Abstraction then also means that stretch, exhaustion or finiteness of the territory become hard to grasp.

It may become slightly tedious, but once more this takes us back to the American Indians. They understood only too well that they had to kill just enough buffaloes to survive, not so many that the buffalo would become extinct, not so few that they themselves would die from cold and starvation. Admittedly, ecologists today tend to romanticise the American Indians' sense of environmental balance, but all the same it is a nice illustration of the specific quality of use value. Those who actually use a product, know its value (sometimes only after a while) and, again, in a twofold way: both the value of the qualities of a product (the things you can do with it) and the value of its limits, say, its level of 'fatigue' or 'exhaustion', or sustainability.

With Marx, a structural approach to the current (mis)management of territory would therefore advocate a drastic shift from exchange value to use value. To be clear, this does not argue in favour of total de-privatisation. After all, private property too can be appreciated exactly because of its high use value. It is only when the exchange value gains the upper hand that the private domain becomes corroded. What it comes down to is that we have to re-evaluate and upgrade the use value and in some cases even fully restore it, whether it concerns public or private territory. And not only for ecological reasons, but also for the much-needed maintenance of our own character or identity.

## CORROSION

Exchange value is the reason, not only that we easily buy and sell territory but also that we can quickly exchange one territory for another. For example, many professionals lead a forced nomadic life nowadays, having to frequently change jobs and residence, and therefore territory. In *The Corrosion of Character*, Richard Sennett describes how this global drift corrodes our individual character. By character, he means the long-term aspect of our emotional experience. Character is expressed by loyalty and mutual commitment, or through the pursuit of long-term goals, or by the practice of delayed gratification for the sake of the future. ... The personal traits which we value in ourselves and for which we seek to be valued by others.<sup>9</sup> But, he continues, short-term capitalism threatens to corrode [his] character, particularly those qualities of character which bind human beings to one another and furnish each with a sense of sustainable self.<sup>10</sup>

If territory first and foremost refers to a personal mental and physical space, which we can only experience because it is delineated and because we have a certain sense of control over it, then the question is whether this possibility still exists today. Even if we are not forced to leave our territory, its jacked-up exchange value guarantees that the territory around us transmutes with lightning speed. Do we still have time to connect and bond with the people and things around us? And do we even want to? It seems that many thirtysomethings today suffer from fear of commitment...

This corrosion of character, and the diminishing opportunities to bind ourselves to other people and our immediate environment for the long-term and attain an embedding through sustainable use, at least explains the extreme rigid identity reflex that we are confronted with almost everywhere these days. In another book, Sennett<sup>11</sup> writes that less and less people succeed in developing into adults. They remain stuck in adolescence for their whole life, as it were. By this the philosopher refers to the stubborn character trait of continuously confirming one's own identity in a rigid and principal manner. For fear of losing individuality, the adolescent stubbornly clings to principles in order to obtain an identity. Now, this is quite normal and perhaps even necessary behaviour in youngsters who still have to establish their place in the world. In adults, however, it leads to pathological rigidity whereby all that is different is seen as threatening. This pathology expresses itself on the collective and political level in nationalisms, walls, travel bans, gated communities and other fortifications. In short, the terrain is again persistently closed off and defended in order to protect identity—a word that, how fittingly, stems from the Latin *identitas* or 'sameness', which in this context means the urge to keep things 'the same', to maintain the status quo. This predilection for sameness and confirmation of identity grows in direct proportion to the increase in exchange value and therefore the exchangeability of the territory. It shouldn't come to us as a surprise therefore that nowadays a growing number of adults, including company managers, religious leaders and especially prominent politicians display adolescent behaviour.

<sup>9</sup> Richardt Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character - The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. New York & London: Norton & Company., 1998, p. 10

<sup>10</sup> *ibid* p.27

<sup>11</sup> Richardt Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder. Personal Identity and City Life*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1970

## MONOTOPIA VERSUS HETEROTOPIA

From Brexit to Trumpism, these are all expressions of the fear for the loss of territory. Panic caused by fear of being overrun by migrants and refugees, fear of job loss, of personal prosperity, 'own' values and 'own' identity always emerges within a worldview in which everything competes with everything else. When a territory has been taken by someone, it can no longer be used by someone else. Trade agreements and common markets increase exchange value while degrading use value—if only by limiting the lifespan of commodities. The faith in blind competition backfires into reactionary attitudes, fundamentalism and terror. When in the game of supply and demand everything is related to everything and therefore becomes relative and liquid, people frantically try to find firm ground again. They feel an urgent need to demarcate the territory and even take up arms again. This is a highly paradoxical mental state in which neoliberalism and neo-nationalism easily find each other and overlap. From Silvio Berlusconi, via David Cameron and Bart De Wever to Donald Trump, we see expressions of new ideological and political formations that reconcile free trade with protectionism and conservatism in a highly original manner. The result is a curiously repressive liberalism in which fear of loss of territory is overcompensated by a rigid delineation of it.

In any case, in the past decade in Europe, the wet dream of a common market with free competition and frictionless mobility has turned into a bitter nightmare full of political name-calling, troikas and barbed wire. In particular these troikas are evidence of the belief that unity within the European Union can be achieved or restored by fixing the economy, that mutual trust can be gained by balancing budgets. In this belief, the European territory is seen as a monotopia in which the competition between (creative) cities, regions and countries benefits everyone. Until recently, no one would have dared to predict that this European utopia might very well turn into a dystopia of reactionary divisive politics. Nevertheless, social geographers Ole Jensen and Tim Richardson neatly pointed out, as early as 2004, that a policy of competition between cities, regions or countries might raise the common prosperity, but would also always generate winners and losers. No matter how relative differences may be, the inherent logic of competition is that it creates a hierarchy of at least gradual inequalities between those who have more and those who have less. Those who see the free market as the foundation of the territory apply the same measure to all residents, cities, regions and countries, looking only at their differences in quantitative terms. From that perspective there are only actors who do better or not so well, who are very successful or do very badly. Then there are only front runners and stragglers and everyone in between, but everyone is going in the same direction, towards the same worthy goal. That goal is after all easy to calculate and can be expressed in numbers. Within Europe, this leads to the ironic but rather apt spectacle in which glances are occasionally cast from right to left, or from east to west, but mainly from down to up or from the geographical south to the north. It may no longer be a land or gold rush, but it is a competitive rush

to the economic top—whereby the North dictates the norm—that has transformed the European landscape into a minefield of envy and mutual blaming. ‘Bankrupt’ Greece was accused of mismanagement and corruption, whereas rich tax haven Luxembourg quietly won the rat race. It brings to mind the old saying about the pot calling the kettle black. Fierce competition inevitably leads to envy and exclusion, along with the occasional foul play.

The crucial fallacy of Europe as a hegemony is the belief that cultural differences can be smoothed over by making everything mutually comparable (in exchange value). Or, in line with the preceding argument: the belief that differences in use, in the *cultivation* of the territory, can be solved by making the territory itself interchangeable, albeit at some cost. However, this ignores the fact that the territory as a much-needed space of security and mental safety only emerges by using it. Territory, in other words, is pure culture. It is the result of the work of assigning meaning by which an arbitrary landscape or a meaningless area becomes *meaningful*. Only in the use of the space is that space charged with meanings, affects, indeed with value. It is only because residents, through (long-term) use, acquire knowledge of and become familiar with their environment that they form an attachment to it. In short, through the working and cultivation of an abstract space that space is transformed or articulated into concrete, although mentally experienced territory. This is why a physical breach of the territory always also has a psychic repercussion, and the latter often lingers longer than the former. This is because territory is in the first place an affect - and value-laden symbolic space that is charged in processes of assigning meaning, or, simply, by culture. And this is the turf on which artists and cultural organisations can play a crucial part. By using their environment they continuously articulate and re-articulate the territory. With all their massively singular articulations of sometimes completely contradictory ideas and artefacts they generate a murmuring of meanings. Against the monotopia of the common market they pose a heterotopia of images and ideas. A certain terrain can be occupied by only one entity at a time, but it can be re-articulated and thereby cultivated by many, in endless variations. This is the fundamental difference between exchange value and use value.

#### **ART AS USE VALUE**

Perhaps the quality of art and culture is presented in a somewhat too positive a light here. As we know, artists, curators and other cultural professionals are equally capable of jacking up exchange value. The auctioning of artworks in the art market, as well as the competition between creative cities, cultural capitals, art festivals and biennales all take part in an economy of seduction in which artistic activities and artefacts, as brands, determine the surplus value within the exchange value. From phallic architecture to spectacular shows and other mediagenic art events, they are all the driving force behind a monotopian culture of consumption, herding us frictionless across a smooth landscape from one sensation to the next. This is the unavoidable force of aesthetics



as *aesthesis*: it speaks to our senses. And ever since the advent of propaganda, publicity, logos and brands we know that design and art are peerless when it comes to seduction. They make us glide tirelessly over the surface from one façade to the next. Sign value and not use value is the driving force behind our urge to consume today. Design often prevails in blinding competition battles on the basis of functionality, nowadays.

However, we also know that artists can oppose these hysterical market mechanisms. They can at least, through irony and over-identification, reveal the peculiarities of an exaggerated exchange and even fetish value. We only have to bring to mind the stunts pulled by Damien Hirst or the more political actions of The Yes Men to recognise that artists are at least capable of relating to their own work context in a self-reflective manner. However, as is especially evident in the case of Hirst, this highly ironic and even publicly cynical attitude has little effect. It merely confirms the insanity of a market in which such artists make quite a decent living, by the way. What else could they do but be opportunistic and cynical?

Today, alternative looking artists and curators too can smoothly surf the global landscape with their backpacks and portfolios full of radical political ideas. Meanwhile they draw grey lines across Blue Marble on their cheap flights from one artist residency to the next and from biennale to biennale, where they can repeat their declarations of radical involvement to the same crowd of the already converted. (The word 'radical' may well be the best-selling brand in the professional art world of the past five years.) The point is that alternative artists as well frictionlessly exchange one destination for another, one territory for another. It is no coincidence that such exchanges are smoothly facilitated via subsidised cultural exchange programmes and collaborations. Within the European Union there are quite a few avenues of support for this. After all, both artists and cultural institutions can contribute to the hoped-for monotonopia. From a policy standpoint, artistic and cultural exchanges only too often serve to smooth over cultural differences and make identities look more similar, in order to enhance the circulation in the common market. Romanticising a nomadic and sometimes even precarious identity is of course beneficial to an economy that has been aiming for mobility and high flexibility over the past few decades. The constantly travelling artists and curators are exemplary protagonists of a hypermobile labour market.<sup>12</sup> This market demands that employees or, rather, a superfast growing mercenary army of freelancers, develop a certain immunity against the territory in which they find themselves. As already stated, all this on behalf of smooth interchangeability.

<sup>12</sup> see also Gielen, *The Murmuring of the Artistic Multitude*. Global Art, Politics and Post-Fordism. Amsterdam: Valiz, 2015

In short, the solution or opposition does not necessarily lie in the political message that artists may proclaim with their work, but what is important is whether they act politically or not with their work (however a-political or formal that work may be). The crucial point is how they organise their own artistic practices within society and how they help shape that society through those practices. Predictably enough, this comes down to putting use value

above exchange value again. After all, artists have been trained in certain skills that can accomplish this. First of all, they have the power of imagination to, for example, think of multiple, sometimes even contradictory use values for the same territory. It is one of the qualities that enable Renzo Martens to see a cacao plantation in the Congo as not just a raw-material producing area for the West, but also to re-articulate it as a creative development area for the South. That last verb indicates yet another skill often found with artists to intensify use value: artists have the special ability to constantly articulate situations and territories anew. Each new novel, each new performance and any other statue or installation may contain an alternative interpretation of the same field. In other words, the territory can be made and used again thousands of times without any need to exhaust or consume it. Besides, the artists' sense of aesthetics can do more than jack-up the exchange value through seduction; it can also be deployed to intensify the use of and sensitivity to the environment. Aesthetics, especially, can transform a landscape or a building into a familiar environment. It is the design and experience of smells, colours, sounds, temperatures and all things tangible that turn a house into a home and an abstract wasteland into a homeland, into, indeed, a familiar and cherished territory. It is not in the first place rational arguments, cognitive considerations and rules of law that turn a terrain into a territory, but rather affect, attachment and love that make it a familiar place. These latter elements are only evoked by addressing all the senses, by experiencing a place, not by calculating it rationally. Aesthetics not only allow us to observe Blue Marble in a detached manner as just a pretty picture, but also to feel, smell and hear the globe in a hundred different ways as well. Aesthetics provide the empathetic ability for us to live in and embed ourselves in the territory.

Finally, there is another special quality or potential in design. It cannot only intensify use, but also review the various users and attune them to each other. Urban planner and mobility expert Sabine Lutz demonstrates this with a simple example of how to design a street. Traditionally, streets are designed functionally, with clear demarcations of where cars, bicycles and pedestrians should go. The various users are neatly separated, which means they are hardly aware of the collective use of that same territory. The result: they regard the terrain they use themselves as only for them and sometimes even as their private domain. A simple redesign that lifts this functional demarcation can make them experience this use quite differently.

It comes about when a street is redesigned to help drivers change their routines: they see various people doing different things to their left and right, and sometimes directly ahead. They recognise that the street is alive, not only lengthwise, but also crosswise. They (car drivers) slow down, thereby making the street safer for everyone.

A different design encourages pedestrians and cyclists to use the entire street, not just the sidewalks and bike paths. They can cross the street wherever they like, not only at designated pedestrian crossings. That

requires a certain amount of trust (but not blind trust) that generally speaking, drivers are not murderers. Pedestrians and cyclists, too, bear responsibility for safety. They make contact and make sure that they have been seen, while at the same time signalling to drivers: the street is not yours alone.<sup>13</sup>

**13** Sabine Lutz, *Shared Space: A space Shared is a Space Doubled*, In Bollier, D. & Helfrich, S. (eds.) *The Wealth of the Commons. A World beyond Market & State*. Amherst: Levellers Press, 2012, p. 236-238.

Perhaps Lutz's argument may not wholly convince us to trustingly 'release' our six-year-olds on their bicycles in traffic with tough SUV drivers, but her description does make clear that the use of a territory can be understood and experienced completely differently through design. Mutual visibility reveals our interdependencies, for instance. Of course there will always be power relations between SUV drivers and bicyclists, between strong and weak users, but in this case these are not hidden. Although these users are absolutely unequal, Lutz nevertheless presents them here as users of equal standing of the same territory. Their mutual visibility at least also reveals the power relations that exist between them. Because of the design we understand and even 'feel' the territory as a shared (user) space. Obviously, the above traffic situation does not by itself immediately lead to smooth, frictionless or harmonious interactions. The road users must frequently, and perhaps time and again, negotiate and delineate 'their' territory, and obviously on occasion there will be conflicts. Some name-calling, pushing and shoving are to be expected now and again. In other words, the design does not assume any pre-existing consensus about the use of the road. This will have to be renegotiated time and again through dissensus, either explicitly or not. The only consensus that this design implicitly imposes is that all road users are of equal standing. This means that all have a right to use the territory, which nobody can deny, not even the SUV driver—unless we are dealing with a real murderer.

In a very different context than Lutz's ideal traffic space, this example does appeal to the imagination. Would it be possible to design social territories, such as buildings, squares, Internet and media spaces, cities, regions, Europe... as such shared spaces? Can we imagine a place where instead of pedestrians, bicyclists and car drivers, let's say multinationals, refugees, democrats and populists have an equal right of use? Would it even be possible – and this is probably a step further than Lutz's proposal – that users take the design of shared space into their own hands? In spite of their enormous differences? Can we, in other words, re-articulate territory as a heterotopian place where contradictions and paradoxical practices bump and grate against each other in relative peace?

Of course such questions reek of naïve idealism and of utopia. Then again, it is the imaginary power of art and fiction in particular that makes it possible for us to at least think of such spaces. Even more so, within and sometimes even outside the space of fiction we can effectively experiment and play with such notions. If anything, the heterogeneous range of contributions to this book makes that clear. Artists have, or take, the autonomous right to appropriate territory time and again in different ways. They are allowed to contradict

each other and even themselves. They make full use of the use value without concerning themselves with the exchange value. In this way, the current reactionary responses to the climate of terror can be warded off. An imaginary, heterotopian territory at least makes it clear that the current model of monopia is also nothing but a utopia. It exposes hegemonic political plans that are presented as feasible, as just as much fiction. Perhaps the biggest political strength of artistic practices is that they can debunk, through the power of imagination, what is taken for true, real and obvious. And doesn't that also sum up the absolute use value of the arts?

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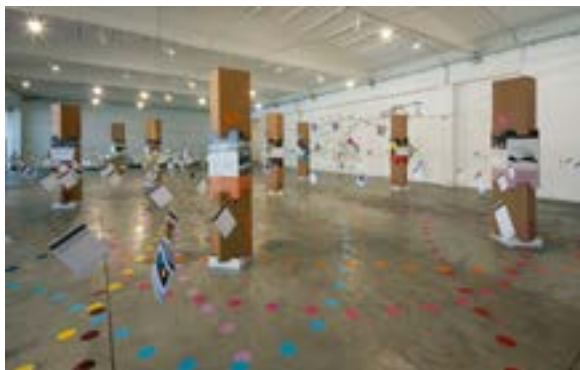
Cittadellesse

by Paolo Naldini



# Demopraxy: Reinventing the Space Between Us From Betrayal to Praxis

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, parallel to neoliberalism establishing itself as global order, the so-called creative class has come to be evoked as a competitive asset for localities such as cities aspiring to a global position. Opportunities for creative professionals, particularly artists, often come through a succession of residencies pretending to deliver some form of connection and integration with the local, but often only providing artists with a space to live a life detached from any real interaction or engagement with a place and its people. Over time, this tends to create a sort of un-rootedness in which artists lose touch with the everyday reality of those who are not artists and consequently lose their opportunity to interrogate, question, subvert and transform this reality. This process could be seen as a kind of de-territorialisation process. Artists and creatives are often lured to these opportunities with the promise of all that a shining economic system seems to offer, a successful launch into a world-



sized machine that encompasses the planet from East to West and from South to North.

Could a re-territorialisation process be a possible path to seeking answers? One cannot help but see how one of the major consequences of the neoliberal globalisation has



Above and left: "What's the problem? Economy. 5 paths through the geographies of change", exhibition at Cittadellarte - Fondazione Pistoletto, courtesy of Enrico Amici

been the resurgence or reinforcement of localism and populism. The point is: can re-localised artists contribute to empowering and supplying communities and contexts in their quest for reformulating the social contract binding individuals, groups, organisations and institutions at local, inter-local, regional, national and global levels? What tools and methodologies would need to be in place for artists to achieve authentic engagement with localities and make their contributions useful? Who else, then, would they encounter in such an endeavour?



**"Il gioco del loco", curated by ARTIMRETI, Cittadellarte - Fondazione Pistoletto, courtesy of Enrico Amici**

It is a striking paradox that when more and more people are forced to migrate towards a pretended rich world, this very ruling order is revealed to be insufficient and unsustainable; as though the whole of humanity (including not only the middle class but equally, the leading global class of financial capitalists) were forced to migrate from an extracting/exploiting paradigm to a regenerating/sharing one. But of course the two phenomena are actually consequences of the same forces and might possibly find commonalities (see for example the Silent University project<sup>1</sup>). It is clear that an increasingly aggressive and all-encompassing colonising process is tightening its grip at the very moment, and to some extent, perhaps, because of the fact, that it is sensing its own end approaching.

<sup>1</sup> The Silent University is a solidarity based knowledge exchange platform by refugees, asylum seekers and migrants (<http://the-silentuniversity.org>), founded by Ahmet Ögüt, 2012.

However, there is an inevitable counter-argument represented by myriad processes subverting and deviating from the exploiting narrative as it is being enacted: such as various ways of organising things differently and making them work to have a positive impact on people's lives, mostly at the local level. These are to be found everywhere on the globe.

From mega-cities to the rural, in small but consistent ways, a geography of change is being shaped (see [www.geographiesofchange.net](http://www.geographiesofchange.net)). But this dialectical process, juxtaposing as a thesis the globalised empire of neo-liberal order and as an antithesis this geography of transformation, demands that the antithesis is proportionate to the thesis. Therefore, in order to facilitate a synthesis, we need to reinforce tremendously the emerging paradigms. We need a new narrative capable of weaving together the living forms of this geography of change, and which will illuminate its underlying ideas, that might reformulate or regenerate the prevailing narrative, i.e. that of democracy as a monotheistic canon.



**Third Rebirth Forum Geografías de la Transformación, L'Avana Cuba 2016, courtesy Paola Martínez Fiterre**

Many forces and practices seem to be challenging the current paradigm of representation by delegation. Modernity opened a space between the represented and the representative; it was assumed this space would have remained neutral and irrelevant, as the pact between the two sides was to be safeguarded. But this empty and deserted space expanded more and more and allowed for



losing view and track of one another. Betrayals, when not simple misunderstandings, would not be avoidable any more. Mediators and bureaucracies occupied this space and in turn, tried to gain distance and put space between them and the ones whose interest they were to serve - the people, the demos, who had the power, the cratos, on paper. Today, this space has become vast, seemingly infinite. We are left with a feeling of powerlessness. This applies to politics, of course, but more subtly to food and all goods. Everything was delegated in the belief that reality was too vast and difficult to know and manage. The space between us, the things we eat, we wear, we use in our daily life, increased to such an extent we are lost and totally dependent. This comes as a complete denial of the promise held in the word democracy, where cratos stands for power. Those who are totally dependent have no power. This space of betrayal between representatives and represented, between individuals and institutions, between producers and consumers is at the root of much of the current unsustainability. How to face such a challenge? How to regain ownership and possession of this land? How to re-establish a territoriality over this forsaken precious common good?



Today it is technically and culturally possible to re-articulate the ideas of participation and politics, often resolving to use one of the many existing practices already available. The main door to this terrain is the making. Or to use another term, the practice, in whichever field, from the political to the agricultural, from fashion to architecture, from design to manufacturing, from education to health... I called this approach *demopraxy*, and we are working in Cittadellarte to investigate its content, borders and foundations, contradictions and potential, tools and contexts.

**First Forum Rebirth Geografías de la Transformación, L'Avana Cuba 2015, courtesy Paola Martínez Fiterre**

The demos is a notion connected with people and historically people are primarily thought of in terms of land and occupancy, as the Israeli-Palestinian struggle or the campaign for the Kurdish nation is constantly reminding us.

Throughout the project hereby presented in this publication, we explored questions like: what would be the relation between demos and territory under the process of demopraxy? In which ways can the political be enacted and negoti-



ated with the private? We made extensive use of the already existing archive of the geographies of change platform: exhibitions, meetings, editorial products. We held workshop sessions on these and related topics: re-localisation and demopraxy, territoriality and sovereignty, potential and responsibility.

We have liaised with some agencies closer to activists than to artists, and tried to learn one from the other. Much can be done in this regard, as biases and language issues come into play. It has been a learning exercise and this publication also talks about some lessons learned and more still to be learned, hopefully also practically.

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## 2 CHAPTER CITTADELLARTE

by **Giusy Checola**

THIS IS AN EXTRACT, EDITED BY FABRICA, OF A LONGER ESSAY BY GIUSY CHECOLA, WHICH CONTAINS CRITICAL ANALYSIS AND SOURCES ABOUT THE SUBJECT. A FULL VERSION CAN BE FOUND VIA THE UNDERSTANDING TERRITORIALITY WEBSITE.

# The Imaginary Institution of Place: Art, Locality and Territory in Biella Region

The Fondazione Pistoletto rises from the remains of the former Trombetta wool mill, one of the most evocative examples of Biella's industrial archaeology. It dates back to the Middle Ages, when the paleo-industrial system began in Biella due to the proximity to water and the existence of large architectural structures such as castles, churches, convents. The mills, powered by water wheels became part of this landscape.

In Medieval times the word spatium (space) was not really used. Instead, the Latin word used for indicating a place was locus: the site of a specific object or where something occurs. In Germanic, the translated word rum gave place to raum in German, to ruimte in Dutch and rooms in English<sup>1</sup> The geographical term space means a portion of the terrestrial surface, characterised by a "texture of places" or "a portion of occupied space". Conversely, according to the principles and grammar of humanistic geography, formulated in the 1980s, place could be a site of variable dimensions (from a natural monument, such as an ancient tree, to the historic centre of a city) that has a single symbolic connotation, which recalls a specific meaning in the subject's existential sphere. The word, place, contains a dual reality that comes from its tangible nature and human emotion.<sup>2</sup> The European understanding of place seems to be that of *undefined meaning*, containing public, private and common dimensions, which can be related to the geophilosophical ideas of "thinking by concept" which is related to immanence and "thinking by figures" which is related to transcendence.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Thierry Paquot and Chris Younès, *Espace et lieu dans la pensée occidentale*, Paris, La Découverte, 2012, pp. 7-11. Translated by the author.

<sup>2</sup> Adalberto Vallega, *Le grammatiche della geografia*, Bologna, Patron editore, 2004, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, "Géophilosophie", *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, Paris, Les Éditions de minuit, 1991, p. 86. Translated by the author.

According to geographer and orientalist Augustine Berque, in the ontocosmology of Plato, “the father” of Western philosophy, *topos* is the word that represents “space” and corresponds to the question “where is it?”, and *chôra* is the word that represents “place” and corresponds to the question “why that *where?*”.<sup>4</sup> Since the current representation of the universe is essentially mathematical, the ongoing process of ontologically redefining our relationship with the world<sup>5</sup>, seems to be through an expanded form of Plato’s paradigm of rational and unitary meaning. In this universe, the human condition is defined as the condition of an informational interconnected organism (inforg) that shares with biological agents and engineered artefacts a global environment built by information and relocated data, called the infosphere<sup>6</sup>. At the same time, the essential role that locality (i.e. geo-located data and the idea of place), is currently playing in art in public space and in the “making” of place through art, evokes both the vital and existential connotations of Plato’s *chôra* and the need for local distinctiveness, identified as the main quality of “*that where*”.



A statistical analysis by the Ngram Viewer system points out that use of the word locality increased rapidly between 1800 and 1860, and reached its climax in 1916 during WWI. By contrast, use of the term local increased gradually, reaching its peak in the 1990s, a decade which saw the massive spread of the Internet, the birth of Google in the US and the rebirth of communitarian philosophies. Alongside this socially engaged art and place-making became a tool of urban planning, which increasingly became an artistic practice for “the design and development of common spaces, shared environments and civic places created for communities”. Between the 1980s and 1990s, the NEA (National Endowments for the Arts based in Washington, D.C.) changed its guidelines for supporting public art projects in favour of “the creation of unique and unrepeatable aesthetic responses tailored to specific locations within a city” and of making artworks more accessible and socially responsible, i.e. more public<sup>8</sup>, in this way institutionalising *site-specificity*. Similarly the

<sup>4</sup> Augustin Berque, “La ‘chôra’ chez Platon”, in Thierry Paquot and Chris Younès, *Espace et lieu dans la pensée occidentale*, Paris, La Découverte, 2012, pp. 13-16; Augustin Berque, *Milieu et identité humaine. Notes pour un dépassement de la modernité*, Paris, Donnerlieu, 2010. Translated by the author.

<sup>5</sup> Luc Brisson, Platon aujourd’hui, *Études platoniciennes*, 9 | 2012, published on 01 March 2014, consulted on 01 Avril 2017. <http://etudesplatoniciennes.revues.org/261>

<sup>6</sup> Simone Arcagni, *Visioni digitali. Video, web e nuove tecnologie*, Turin, Einaudi, 2016, p. 3. Translated by the author.

**Ágnes Báthly, *Dissolving Heritage, Former Infermi Hospital. Cittadellarte, Biella, 2015. Digital photography, variable dimensions, courtesy the artist*<sup>7</sup>.**

<sup>7</sup> Ágnes Báthly works on how ideology shapes public space. At Cittadellarte she introduced us to her understanding of territoriality by showing us the images of Szabadság Tér, a quasi-square in the centre of Budapest, formerly occupied by the prison where the Prime Minister Lajos Batthyány was executed in 1849, following the Hungarian Revolution. It contains several monuments like that of the Soviet liberation of Hungary in World War II from Nazi German occupation. She worked on the *Biellese* (the Biella region) between art and activism, in relation to the concepts of *property, possession, occupation* and *possibility* proposing to metaphorically occupy the abandoned buildings of Biella. She made unclear the identification of the buildings in space and time, in order to create the imaginary conditions to rewrite their history and that of the place itself, characterised by their renewed presence and functions. *Dissolving Heritage* is a starting point of an archival project on line that will work on how to collect, dis-identify and reinvent the history of the buildings she will encounter in different areas and cities she will go through.

<sup>8</sup> Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another, Site-specific art and Locational Identity*, Cambridge-London, MIT Press, 2002, p. 67

“geographical humanistic project” has developed new meanings of place, such as “buildings, monuments, neighbourhoods, agricultural areas, forests and so on - that arouse emotion in people and, in so doing, trigger a process of creating symbols and a construction of values”<sup>9</sup>. They become “special signs” that settle into our sphere of existence and into our cultural heritage. So the landscape is no longer taken as a territory, it no longer exists in and of itself but in our consciousness. It exists because human communities have characterised places with symbols and values<sup>10</sup>.

**9** Adalberto Vallega, *op.cit.*, pp.213-214. Translated by the author.

**10** *Ibid.*, pp.213-214. Translated by the author.

The role of art in public space in establishing site-specificity, corresponds to the role land art and former artist-led place-making projects play nowadays in establishing *place-specificity*. In 1967, using earth as medium and canvas to adapt his geometric paintings, Michael Heizer contributed to the birth of a typically American art<sup>11</sup>. In the same period geographers Claude Raffestin and Angelo Turco developed the “theory of territorialisation”, investigating how relationships between human communities and nature grow and evolve, where “territorialisation is understood in terms of human presence and intervention on the Earth’s surface and the consequent transformations of nature”<sup>12</sup>. It outlines the system “nature, human community”, which has transformed the Earth in the World, i.e. in a reality controlled by culture, and later in the Net.

**11** Etienne Landais, *Land Art temps et lieu*, Courrier de l’Environnement de l’INRA, n. 24. Translated by the author.

**12** Adalberto Vallega, *op.cit.*, pp. 18-21. Translated by the author.

Founded on a process of investment of the space by the big technical networks of transport and telecommunications, the new “abstract and media civilisation” works against the ancestral difference between city and countryside and confirms the planetary dominance of urbanisation<sup>13</sup>, particularly from 2000 onwards, when the information carried by Internet has grown exponentially. It is also in this period that Turco visualised the territorialisation process as a complex form of control composed by three stages: intellectual control, giving meaning to single place by attributing symbols and signs; material control, which transforms symbolic meaning by physical intervention, developing technologies and models for intervention on the terrestrial surface; and structural control, which divides the terrestrial surface according to its different functions and resources, subjecting it to a regulatory regime determined by the authority of certain subjects<sup>14</sup>. In 1999, the US association for place-making planning, Project for Public Space, published *The Eleven Principles for Creating Great Community Places*, key milestones that helped launch and define the Placemaking movement which centres on the community<sup>15</sup>. In 2013 the leading European association for public art, Situations, in Bristol declared *The New Rules of Public Art*, a “set of possibilities” to provoke debates about new ways of thinking about public art and its future<sup>16</sup>.

**13** Françoise Choay, *La règle et le modèle. Sur la théorie de l’architecture et de l’urbanisme*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1980 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1996), p. 12. Translated by the author.

**14** Adalberto Vallega, *op.cit.*, p. 21. Translated by the author.

**15** Project for Public Space, *The Eleven Principles for Creating Great Community Places*, 1999. available at the link: <http://www.pps.org/reference/11steps/>

**16** Situations, *The New Rules of Public Art*, 2013, available at the link: <https://publicartnow.com/2013/12/12/the-new-rules-of-public-art/>

According to philosopher and psychoanalyst Cornelius Castoriadis, the “engineering” and the “mediums” of Plato’s theory come from “the natural and supernatural assignation of specific functions to citizens by the ideal city created by the philosopher”. According to this vision, “the natural laws are mathematical laws”, whose essential objective is that of “finishing with politics as in search of the best forms of life in common”<sup>17</sup>. Finally, he states, the refusal

**17** Cornelius Castoriadis, *op.cit.*, pp. 322-328. Translated by the author.

of Plato's "essential Greek heritage", that is the creation of Athenian democracy, "has succeeded both in the establishment of modern rationalism and of the modern world as a world dominated by the central imaginary meaning of the unlimited expansion of a pseudo-rational matrix"<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 322-328.  
Translated by the author.

On the relationship between art, locality and territory, the author developed two research modules around the Biella territory and at Cittadellarte, directed by Paolo Naldini, within the programme of the project Understanding Territoriality: Identity, Place and Possession. The modules were conceived and organised within the frame of the University of Ideas (UNIDEE) programme directed by Cecilia Guida<sup>19</sup>, an experimental educational-residency model based on the production of critical thinking and exchange of knowledge among mentors and participants from all over the world.

<sup>19</sup> For more information about University of Ideas: <http://www.cittadellarte.it/unidee/>.

Temporary guild, *I love you customer*, Biella, 2015.  
Banner printed on textile by Ermenegildo Zegna



Twenty artists, urbanists, researchers and composers took part in the modules titled *Creating Territorialities* (2nd – 7th November 2015), related to the UNIDEE research concepts of temporality, responsibility and participation; and *The Shifting Place. Aesthetics, Spatial and Temporal Fractures of Transitional Territories* (16th – 24th June, 2016), related to the UNIDEE research concepts of research towards project, gift and alteration. Collaborating with the participants





were geographers, activists, historians, architects and agricultural producers: Ágnes Báthly (Hungary), Johanna Bratel (Sweden), Anna Bromley (Germany), Bahar Habibi (Iran), Diva Helmy (USA), Lorenza Ippolito (Italy), Lia Krucken (Brazil), Ji Hyun Park (South Korea), Vittoria Soddu (Italy) and Thomas Gilardi, together with Elena Rosina, Enrico Rey, Giuseppe Pidello (La Trappa di Sordevolo), Luigi Spina and Simonetta Vella (Centre Documentation of CGIL), Ellen Bermann (Biellese in Transizione); and Alaa Abu Asad (Palestine), Silvia Cruells Lado (Spain), Andrew Friend (United Kingdom), Emma Gibson (Australia), Eleni Kamma (Greece), Teresa Palmieri (Italy), Eijla Ranta (Finland), Chiara Sgaramella (Italy), Moonis Shah (India), Wayne Wang-Jie Lim (Singapore) with Andrea Degli Innocenti and Roberto Vietti (Italia Che Cambia), Fiorella Costanza (Biellese in Transizione), Armona Pistoletto (Let Eat Be), Edoardo Ferlo and Mirko Mantovan (Cascina Foresto), Gigi Manenti and Cristina Sala, Associazione Pace Futuro and Michele De Biase (Agrozero).

**Net of nets produced by the AM Fungus, mycorrhizal symbiosis. Courtesy Gigi Manenti and Cristina Sala**

Among the final project ideas, two were developed collectively as representative of established and potential relationships with the Biella region, of its site-specificity and place-specificity: the production of a banner titled *I love you customer* and the creation of an algorithm here called The Shifting Algorithm. They can be considered as basic imaginary forms of the institution of place, with their symbolic, material and regulatory meanings<sup>20</sup>. They arise from concepts of locality created and reactivated by participants, in the communitarian and common dimensions of locality and in relationship with old and new cultural traditions.

The banner *I love you customer* came out of *Creating Territorialities*. It was produced by a temporary guild within the working group comprising of Lorenza Ippolito, Lia Krucken, Johanna Bratel, Bahar Habibi, Vittoria Soddu and Anna Bromley, inspired by the Mutual Aid Society, a voluntary association formed within the factories between workers, to provide mutual aid and benefit in case of need prefiguring most functions of the modern state. The group also composed a performance, a video and a sound piece installed in *Ameriña*. *Territorio Fluctuante*, the artwork by artist Juan Esteban Sandoval consisting of a news stand in Cittadellarte, examining the relationship between identity, history and communication<sup>21</sup>. The project responded to the programme's request to think about territoriality as a reconstruction of interrupted co-evolutionary relationships between human settlement and the environment, reactivating the interrupted production of territoriality and therefore locality in new

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<sup>20</sup> The title of the text is taken from the ongoing Ph.D thesis by the author about artist-led processes of territorialisation in relation with one of the most important works of contemporary European thought, *L'institution imaginaire de la société* (The Imaginary Institution of Society) by Greek-French philosopher, economist, psychoanalyst Cornelius Castoriadis. Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société*, Paris, Éditions du Seuil, 1975. The book has been published in English by Kathleen Blamey and published by Blackwell Publishers in 1987 and 1998 under the title of *The Imaginary Institution of Society*.

<sup>21</sup> For more information about Juan Esteban Sandoval visit the websites: <http://www.tropical-world.net/amerina.htm>, <http://www.elpuentelab.org/concept.htm>

conceptual, spatial and visual forms, – as forms of space-temporal discontinuity, considering the “territorial tradition” as “partial forms of identification”<sup>22</sup>.

The Shifting Algorithm came out of *The Shifting Place. Aesthetics, Spatial and Temporal Fractures of Transitional Territories*. The project idea was based on the programming of an algorithm by artist Moonis Shah, which creates a tree for data that can be considered an attempt at creating the basic form of a common digital landscape, composed by a list of words to be searched. This came out of participants’ research into three lines: Locality between Space and Place (Emma Gibson, Teresa Palmieri and Wayne Wang-Jie Lim); Community and ‘proprium’ (Eija Ranta, Moonis Shah, Chiara Sgaramella, Andrea Degli Innocenti, Teresa Palmieri); From the Real to reality (Alaa Abu Asad, Andrew Friend, Silvia Cruells Lado). The project highlights the need to make visible the structure of the nets of life, such as those of arteries of the heart, arterial roads on a map and rivers, but also social relations, towards an “originating” net, such as the net of mycorrhizal symbiosis, which activates the reproduction of wild vegetation.

It resulted from discussions about the experience of the Biellese (the Biella region) with agricultural producers, members of local and national organisations engaged in social-cultural change about issues such as resilience, permaculture, bioregionalism and degrowth. The algorithm gives birth to a basic tree of data that reproduces unceasingly by itself, bypassing the content filtering system of the search engines, “semantic authorities of our times”<sup>23</sup> and revealing the existence of the excluded meanings of the words by the process of automatic selection, that is a process of territorial design and knowledge production.

The words searched by the algorithm, metaphorical microorganisms for creating the primary tree, were, in order of appearance: Permaculture / Transition / Bioregionalism / Rifting / Placemaking / Common / Place / Space / Locality / Redistribution / Seeds / Rooting / Hybrid / Margin / Paradise / Creation / Portal / Code / Dystopia / Utopia / Origin / Origins / Commonality / Becoming / Patrimoniality / Mycelium / Archetype / Dark Matter / Subterranean / Transition / Range / Territory / Permanence / Resilience.

The Biella landscape is the place where between 1944 and 1955, during the Italian Resistance, the Mountain Pact was signed by workers and industrialists. It was the first European pact stipulating equal pay for men and women. Signed in the middle of the Nazi-Fascist occupation at a secret location in the woods, the contract has taken on symbolic value, setting the stage for reconstruction based on association, mutual aid and solidarity. The mutual-based society reached a golden age between 1860 and 1880, when they united in a Pact of Brotherhood inspired by politician, journalist and activist Giuseppe Mazzini and politician Aurelio Saffi. In 2014, in Turin, the SMSS, Mutual Healthcare Aid Society, was reborn. Just as it was for their 19th-century great-grandmothers, it is an association created to make up for the shortcomings of the Italian welfare state.

**22** Homi K. Bhabha, “The Location of Culture” (*Border Lives: The Art of the Present*, London – New York, 1994, pp. 1-9), in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-2000. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishing, 2011

**23** Artist and urban planner Donato Faruolo coined this expression during Maverick platform program, about research and cultural territorial politics. The programme, directed by the author together with Angelo Bianco and Roberto Martino, has been promoted by Fondazione Southeritage for Contemporary Art based in Matera, Basilicata (Italy), in partnership with MUDAM Musée d’Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean (Luxembourg). *What You See is What You Here* (Paris), Archiviazioni . Art and Planning in Public Sphere (SouthernItaly), in the frame of Matera European Capital of Culture 2019. Website: <http://maverick-campus.org/>

The Mutual Aid Society flags of the Biellese were mostly made by women. Historian Luigi Spina showed Creating Territorialities participants a collection from the CGIL archive of Biella, which came mainly from the arts and crafts guilds, which used symbols of the brotherhood, colours of the new state and emphasised the *public* function of communitarianism. However, the traditional way Mutual Aid Societies represented themselves was interrupted by stylistic and linguistic innovations by workers of the Mutual Aid Society of Tollegno in the 19th century. They replaced symbols with their own names, prioritising the existential value of the worker as a man or woman above that of being a member of a community. Community, according to anthropologist Alain Marie, can be defined as “*structural* logic of ‘solidarity’, that refers to a principle composed by three main criteria: the reference to the same origin or at least at a common history”; “the reference to customs, faiths, values and visions of the world defining an inherited symbolic heritage”; “the reference to social links that are thought and organised according to a paradigmatic logics of the kinship”<sup>25</sup>.



**Ji Hyun Park, Unnamed view, Biella 2015. Video, loop<sup>24</sup>**

**24** Ji Hyun Park deals with issues of surveillance and the control between the inside and the outside, she creates membranes that could permeate and mediate the interaction between the two as interstitial space. At Cittadellarte she reflected about how the relation between humans and nature allowed her to create territoriality in the past. Throughout the Biella region, she performed her own territoriality as live and life experience, searching for an unknown across the landscape.

**25** Alain Marie, *Communauté, individualisme, communautarisme: hypothèses anthropologiques sur quelques paradoxes africains*, *Sociologie et sociétés*, vol. 39, n.2, 2007, Translated by the author.

**26** Roberto Esposito, *Communitas. Origine e destino della comunità*, Turin, Einaudi, 1998.

**27** Gigi Manenti, Cristina Sala, *Alle radici dell'agricoltura. Un metodo naturale tra problemi economici ed ecologici*, Firenze, Libreria Editrice Fiorentina, 2012, p. 53. Translated by the author.

*I love you customer's* banner, produced by the temporary guild of six female artists, evoked the spiritual-political function of the Biella landscape and the return to ancient forms of territoriality built around community as local and global. It also links the ethical and revolutionary behaviour of Mutual Aid Societies to the behaviours of Guerrilla Girls and other contemporary artists of the time, by fabricating an object that represents their political organisation. On the other hand, the decision to refer to more traditional flags, expands the predominance of a communitarian approach in the Biellese. For this reason, *I love you customer's* banner seems to reiterate an “authentic” identitarian form of territoriality. Are we confronting temporary art communities created as a “partial form of territorial identification” or as model of the “broadest territorial subjectivity”, that “in spite of the alleged opposition to the individualist paradigm, ‘inflates’ the degree of the self in a hypertrophy figure of the ‘unity of unities’<sup>26</sup>?

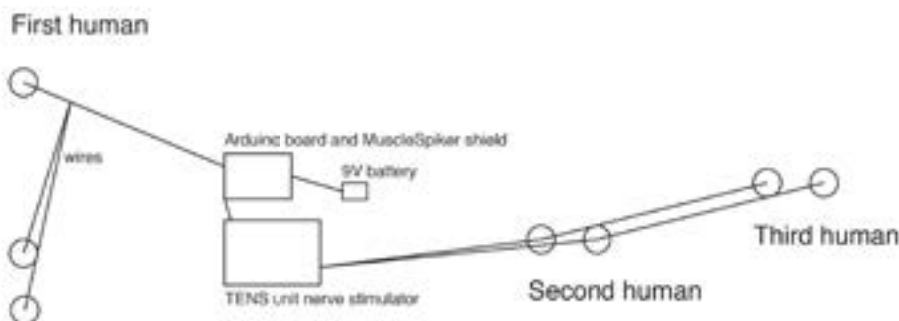
Like knowledge production, cultural humus, the substratum of social, spiritual and cultural factors that promotes, encourages and conditions the growth of situations, facts and events, and is favoured by the diversity of organic compounds and the presence of micro-organisms<sup>27</sup>, The Shifting Algorithm makes it possible to reproduce local textual, visual and audio-visual data on a planetary scale. Like the AM fungus that activates the mycorrhizal symbiosis, the rhizomatic deviations created by the algorithm's work could potentially colonise the wild spaces of the Net. The words searched were the ones excluded by the module's participants during the work in progress with the three thematic research groups, because they were common to all of them.



Bypassing semantic forms of censorship by search engines, exclusion resulting from state-specific agreements, to make visible hidden local concepts and place-related words at a global level, the algorithm project establishes the impossibility of any conceptual or geopolitical pre-definition of place-thinking and thus place-making. It creates the ground for a re-Babelisation of the digital world.

By considering exclusion to be the main condition that creates the common, The Shifting Algorithm performs a reterritorialising movement, like bacteria that generates an open-ended data collection, perpetually reshaping itself through the accumulation of data. At the same time it creates extreme consequences for the notion of “entry” formulated by writer and critic Nancy Foote, who wrote that only “site-specific works that ‘invite the audience in’ reveal a public commitment”<sup>28</sup>. In the case of The Shifting Algorithm, the entry isn’t meant as form of inclusion, inclusivity or participation, but as access towards a pluralist form of knowledge production, referring to commons rather than communitarianism.

28 Miwon Kwon, *op.cit.*, p. 67



**Diva Helmy, *Human to Humans interface (Hhsl)*, Cittadellarte, Biella, 2015. Neuroscience device, courtesy the artist<sup>29</sup>**

**Alessandro Perini, *Territorialisation of people's body by means of sound*. Cittadellarte, Biella, 2015. Sound composition, courtesy the artist<sup>30</sup>**



29 Diva Helmy works on the relation between art and technology, specifically on physical body extended in those of the others, so also controlled by the others. This extension is an intimate moment in which a form of conscious or unconscious, chosen or imposed trust in the person who is going to be controlled or who is controlling the other, must be established. During a discussion with Giusy Checola and Thomas Gilardi about biological matrix, understood as tissue from which the material and the immaterial “structure” of the human beings develops, she has built *Human to Humans Interface* (Hhsl), a DIY neuroscience device inspired by the work of neuroscientist Greg Gage on experimentation of the “body territorialisation”. Diva experimented with it from one to two other people at the same time (so it can be produced for the physical and non-physical control of groups of people). The device is a tool for controlling the other’s body and for induce pre-established physical reactions. It’s a tool for experimenting with our reaction to others’ extra-territoriality in our body as well. It interrupts the chronological and spatial order of transmission,

The endless accumulation of digital data feeds into collective ‘intelligence’. The data is processed by its collective unconscious, which perhaps, like the unconscious of the individual, is “shaped by the accumulated experience of humanity, which settled down as sediment in the form of ‘archetypes’”. These are “innate dispositions to respond to certain basic kinds of experience” that affect “the creation of symbols, myths and legends”<sup>31</sup>. If “it is not a matter of empirically realising the mythic order” but rather to align oneself “to the myth through the profound or profoundly human building possibilities that it contains”<sup>32</sup>, by favouring discontinuity and disorder The Shifting Algorithm creates processes for the deterritorialisation of the dominant forms of “making” place-specificity and reterritorialises digital worlds through a pluralistic configuration of locality.

According to Berque, by narrating reality as Real (i.e. as un-predicable and unknowable by human beings) the imaginary meaning it produces is received by later generations as a “naturalised” flow of the “ancient canal” of intergenerational transmission. In art’s relationship with ubiquitous computing, place and

life experience, characterised by both anomy and by selfishness, can reality and the Real still be still considered in terms of aporia?

“Biella is a small, closed world, reserved and complex. Only a person from Piedmont could get to the bottom of it to describe it, and I stop in the threshold”, wrote the writer and journalist Guido Piovene in 2003<sup>33</sup>. Nowadays it is the threshold that is expanding towards us as a new undefined place. At the same time, this contributes to relocating the role of artists’ research into reinventing, rethinking and reproducing locality as an identitarian or pluralistic value.

**Giusy Checola is a PhD candidate at University Paris 8 Vincennes Saint-Denis (France) focusing on artist-led place-making and territorialization; researcher at Institute for Public Art (us/China); scientific responsible at Fondazione SoutHeritage (Italy).**

by opening reflections about who/what controls who/what and destabilises our certainties: even though the signal passed, in order of time, from the first person to the second and than to the third one, the strongest one being produced - and consequently the strongest physical sensation and reaction - came from the third one, who finally controlled the others.

**30** Expanding the reflection that brought him to produce the land artwork *Orografia variabile* (Variable orography), where the symbol, as a ‘signifier’, simplifies as much as possible the represented object in the form of a tetrahedron, the simplest tridimensional figure, becoming a wooden frame through which to look at the real as ‘signified’ object, composer Alessandro Perini opened questions concerning the geography of a virtual world and its territorial anomy. His experimentation at Cittadellarte consisted in working on a sound unit of a micro-dna of Cittadellarte, as a unity of place composition, created by unbinding, recombining and altering the symbol of the Third Paradise by Michelangelo Pistoletto. Later he developed a personal soundscape of Biella, based on the so called “memory of the legs”. During the visit at La Trappa in Sordevolo, architect Giuseppe Piddello told us about an old partisan that after decades went back to Sordevolo and found his own way walking through the ancient paths instead of using the map. Alessandro overturned the process and converted the memory of the legs to that of the feet, by putting a microphone on his own shoes and exploring alone while creating his own tactile map.

**31** Carl Gustav Jung, “On the concept of the ‘archetype’”, in Charles Harrison, Paul Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-2000. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Malden, MA, Blackwell Publishing, 2011, pp. 379-381.

**32** Angelo Turco, *op.cit.*, pp. 369-388. Translated by the author.

**33** Guido Piovene, “Viaggio in Italia”, in Gianfranco Bini, Giuseppe Simonetti, Roberto Azzoni, *Tra valli e paesi della Provincia di Biella*, Pauses-Champorcher (AO), Edizioni Lassù Gli Ultimi di Gianfranco Bini, 2003, p. 9. Translated by the author.

by Alaa Abu Asad

# Traces of Locality (and Hence Territoriality)

First evening. Soaked.

The rain did not stop falling profusely in heavy drops all the way up west-northwest from Milan to Novara and from Novara to Biella. The train passed through a sea of flooded green fields. I thought to myself, perhaps those were rice fields? A friend, not really a friend but a guy I met later in Biella, told me that summertime is becoming more tropical and humid in northern Italy, which allows the revival of, if not an ideal milieu for mosquitoes. The rain is hitting historical records in Palestine; the new phenomenon of heavy showers of rain during a very short period of time measured around 100 ml in less than one hour some years ago. This winter, the flooded streets killed an old man in his drowned car.



As a tradition, in the night of the Feast of the Cross (عيد الصليب) women in the Galilee place around seven heaps of salt on the house roof to check the fertility of the upcoming winter season<sup>1</sup>. Each heap signifies one month starting from October to April. If the salt melts away that night, it means that the specific month which the heap indicates is supposed to be rainy and wet, if not there won't be rain.

Meandering through the prairies and mountains of the province of Biella and re-thinking territoriality, the first thing that came to my mind was land. However, it took me a while to find a specific word

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Shukri 'Arraf mentions in his book *al-Ard, al-insan wa-aljuhd* (الأرض، الإنسان والجهد) translates *the Land, the Man and the Effort* that according to the Julian calendar it is used to place up to 12 salt heaps on dry fig leaves representing the whole months of the year. Shukri 'Arraf, *the Land, the Man and the Effort*, 1982, p. 231 and 232 (Arabic).

in my spoken dialect that we use for territory and I could not find one; we actually use the word area instead - منطقة - mantiqa.

And if I had to think about territory in the Palestinian context, both etymologically and conceptually, it would be associated with province, which reads as إقليم 'iqḷīm in Arabic<sup>2</sup>. This phonetically resembles the verb acclimate in English. *The Occupied Palestinian Territories* and *the Palestinian Authority* (PA). The word locality, linked with culture and civilization

mostly, would be associated with some artefacts, artisans, goods, body gestures, and dialects; features and codes of the local production, in its broadest context, of different places in Palestine - the oranges of Jaffa, the bananas of Jericho and the grapes of Hebron! This obviously has more to do with the local place. Local translates as محلي mahalli in Arabic<sup>3</sup> and generally means *domestic*. It is the kind of thing that feels familiar and well-known for long or close associations.

"It seems to me", said a lobbyist guy I met in Amsterdam, "that the global understanding of territoriality, term and use, is being politically overcharged with nation, nationality, and nation state. Which is very problematic." Nodding my head, I agreed with him.



<sup>2</sup> For more uses of the word and examples please check *Reverso Dictionary* <http://dictionary.reverso.net/english-arabic/territory/forced>

<sup>3</sup> See the online dictionary bab.la, direct link <http://en.bab.la/dictionary/english-arabic/local>



**Breakfast (cheese)**

"This political load that territory is charged with echoes very negatively. But what do you think? What is the difference between territory and locality? Or how they intersect?" He asked me.

Well, I think they mostly go hand in hand, although locality is defined by norms and codes that we, cultured beings, created. For instance the same spe-

cific body gesture in Palestine would give a completely different connotation in Italy. I mean, in Palestine it is very common to use your hand and fingers to ask somebody, that cannot hear you for any reason, to wait. But this same hand gesture implies a very disrespectful intention in Italy! But territoriality is born with us, within us..

“How do you mean?”

Territorial behaviour can be a natural behaviour, an instinctive reaction. Look at animals for example.

“But you know what I find nice and interesting? It is when you think horizontally about local problems. For instance, Amsterdam city would collaborate with Barcelona and Brussels on the Airbnb problem<sup>4</sup>. The three cities have to think beyond their territory, beyond the local and national even. Because on a national level, this is not interesting, not even important. Personally speaking, as a Dutch guy, I would have more things in common with somebody who lives in a big city like Amsterdam, than with an ordinary guy from the Northern countryside!”

Inflamed by what territory means and what I have said and heard in the chat with the lobbyist, I went to look up territory in the online Oxford dictionary and read the following:

1. An area of land under the jurisdiction of a ruler or state
2. (Zoology) An area defended by an animal or group of animals against others of the same sex or species.
3. (Especially in the us, Canada, or Australia) An organised division of a country that is not yet admitted to the full rights of a state.<sup>5</sup>

How not to be reactionary in the same way as cats are, because this is the most typical example that comes to mind, are? How is this possible/or not within national states?

“[...] it will be a state totally dependent on Israel economically. That's the first thing to note. Second, it will be at the mercy of Israeli security so that it will not have the power to let people in and out; that will still be in Israeli hands as it is today. Third, it will not have contiguous territory, a very important point. That is to say, if it comes into being now there will be several cantons, all of which will have to be connected via Israeli territory so Israel could cut off one canton from another.”<sup>6</sup>



**Ulifer Çelik, 2017**

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.barcelona-metropolitan.com/in-the-city/the-battle-over-airbnb/> and <http://www.dutchnews.nl/news/archives/2016/05/rules-to-deal-with-airbnb-must-be-national-amsterdam-official/>

<sup>5</sup> See <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/territory>

<sup>6</sup> Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 2003, volume 21, pages 635 -651, An interview with Edward Said, by Cindi Katz and Neil Smith. Direct link <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1068/d2106i> and Edward Said, *The Morning After*, 1993. Direct link <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v15/n20/edward-said/the-morning-after>

## LANDSCAPE CREATING, RATHER FORCING TERRITORY

Walking beside the deserted buildings of what once were textile factories along the river in the Piedmont city of Biella, gives the same feeling of hollowness and agitation that some empty buildings and houses in 'big' cities in Palestine give. These houses and buildings are abandoned because either their owners have left Palestine, or they were destroyed during one of the Intifadas and invasions, and left untouched since then. But the factories in Biella are left due to a shift in the global market. And I wonder how that same horizontal approach the lobbyist guy finds interesting would function here? How would solidarity of people in Ramallah for instance with people in Biella affect the social structure both in Palestine and in Italy? How would it be if it was beneficial not only for the capitalist structure, which makes living opportunities in certain parts available and affordable for a very specific layer of people? How do you prevent marginalised areas being left out unless a beneficial (governmental and private) purpose emerges?



Unprepared and unequipped, we (a group of 10 artists and art practitioners) arrived at the Ecomuseum in the Biellese Alps (Ecomuseo Valle Elvo e Serra) and were glad, perhaps not all of us, to join a semi-hiking tour that the museum arranged on that day. We started to climb the mountains nonetheless, and it was such a special celestial feeling to be above the clouds. We passed through



stone houses that at first glance seemed to be abandoned and unused, and some of them were too small even for people or cattle. But shepherds, who are peculiar to this region, use these houses for shelter in pasture times; a period in the year, usually between spring

and summer, when they take their herds to pasture on journeys that typically last for a couple of weeks. Basically, the shepherds use these houses to hide from rain and to rest, or to keep the butter they prepare fresh, explained the Ecomuseum's director. How funny that some stone houses in Palestine seem abandoned and unused, but they truly are, for people are banned from reaching them, and if they could, they would not be allowed to make use of them<sup>7</sup>. The stone houses in Palestine are abandoned and unused because there are fewer traditional farmers who still use them. As they were traditionally used to save the olive crops, their entrances were shut with dry branches of olive trees to prevent wild animals from entering and destroying, or eating the collected crop.

<sup>7</sup> See [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/things-palestinians-cant-do\\_us\\_586554d4e4boeb58648895bc](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/things-palestinians-cant-do_us_586554d4e4boeb58648895bc) and <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2016/apr/12/fruit-veg-exports-palestine-farmer-conflict-broken-supply-chain-west-bank>



## LAST DAY. REPLETE.

At Cittadellarte we attempted to build a final presentation, while checking different methods and testing a variety of paraphernalia. It was a presentation that could somehow shed light on what could be grasped from our journeys regarding the big terms of locality, territory, space and place that we have been chasing. I think that the challenge of such virtuous - I intended to say naïve - experiences over the short duration of the programme and its serious and complicated topics, lies in the reduction and the allowance of decontextualisation of information that such brief observational trips foster. Let me try to put it differently, I feel that art, in some situations, is expected to provide solutions where it is barely capable of observing things. The experience at Cittadellarte allowed me to be exposed to new issues, situations and problems of the local place that I could relate to because of their familiarity and similarity with the place I come from. However, I always found myself helpless and incapable of providing solutions to these problems through my artistic practice, whether in Biella or in Palestine.



The “cartographic reason”<sup>8</sup> as a tool of drawing territory occupied my mind and my eyes throughout the nine days in Biella. The Biellese Alps play a major geographical role in the territory of the region, of the country and its local weather,



although in other places on earth<sup>9</sup>, other landscape-factors that are more urban, political, or colonial would force a territory and sovereignty. The separation wall in Palestine (and formerly in Berlin). On the one hand, the wall creates an extraterritorial zone say Gaza strip, as an over territorialised and over controlled place for example, but on the other hand, it also creates a non-territorial space, for Palestine exists within and beyond the wall.

<sup>8</sup> John Pickles, *A History of Spaces: Cartographic Reason, Mapping, and the Geo-coded World*, 2003

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.palestine-studies.org/jq/fulltext/198349> and <http://www.justinteriorideas.com/tag/teddy>

**Alaa Abu Asad’s artistic practice and production is dedicated to chasing the quintessence of the photograph, its various applications and integrants: time, place, event, photographer, photographed object/subject, and what emerges between them. Indeed, his endeavours to investigate the image, its meaning, its ways of reading and conceiving, are the preoccupation of the research-based master’s study that he is currently pursuing at the Dutch Art Institute (DAI).**

**All images courtesy Alaa Abu Asad, annotated as per the author’s request.**

by Thomas Gilardi

# Art and Geography: Imagination and Permanence in the Territorial Reconfiguration of Biella

## INTRODUCTION

The recognition of the existence of a relationship between public art, or rather art in a public space, and the spatial dimension of geography is somewhat intuitive. However, the analysis of this relationship from a scientific-disciplinary perspective underlines the fact that the construction of a systematic approach is very complex.

The question is problematic right from the start, in the definition of what is public space and the art that pertains to this space. The experience of the Cittadellarte residence makes it possible to highlight how this inclusive approach, intended as being open to diversity without assimilation, allows for the recognition of some interesting similarities in the spatial and territorial relationships between seemingly distant phenomena.

However, it seems appropriate to consider at least three general criteria to define the phenomena discussed in this work. The first refers to the exceptional nature of the artistic event, its ability to produce a temporal discontinuity that makes it possible to distinguish between a before and an after. The second criterion relates to the territorial value of the phenomenon observed, which makes it possible to identify its different territorial relationships, both direct and indirect, as material as they are abstract. Finally, a third criterion appears to be necessary to recognise its artistic dimension, linked to the expression of a project that is neither common nor trivial (i.e. proposing a view that is profoundly different from the established one).



The interest of geography for art in public spaces is related to its ability to be used as a tool for spatial transformation. In some way, every artistic action in a public space is the bearer of a territorial project, more or less explicit and complex. Therefore it is in the interest of geography to understand its nature and analyse its effects, also in relation to the various territorial projects linked to other times or regions.

An initial analysis of this relationship using the tools of geography makes it possible to highlight the direct physical and spatial impact linked to material aspects (buildings, facilities, infrastructure), while a more abstract analysis reveals the aspects associated with symbolic and cultural values. In fact, artistic events play an important role in the invention and redefinition of a place's image, only at times unintentionally. The intrinsic functionality of artistic events connects to developments in the global economy, which are expressed both in the various uses of land, such as through the processes of investing the natural and rural spaces, both urban and industrial, with new meaning and in the different modes of territorial decomposition and recomposition, characterised by sudden changes in the gravitational areas with respect to the different poles of attraction of the global economy. This type of analysis can also be associated with studies of the impact on identity in the area affected by the event, related to the assimilation of the image auto-generated by the place with the one expressed by the event itself. In this way the artistic event turns out to be an expressive synthesis of a territorial project. Therefore the geographic analysis of the event is equivalent to research into the ways in which the local territory incorporates its identity in the event itself in order to be recognised and to carry out its project.

The recognition of territorial identities requires the recognition of a recipient of the project itself. In fact this can be aimed at the inhabitants or visitors, which may inevitably recognise different elements. Also interesting in this frame is the production of artistic projects by non-local artists in cosmopolitan contexts. They are asked to match the message of their artistic project with the requirements of the local area. The same goes for the relationship between the artistic project and the various local authorities. In fact, in each area the dynamic balance of local authorities is expressed with multiple self-representations of their territory, in which strong actors and protest groups have different roles. Finally, the question of the duplication of artistic events having a strong territorial significance remains open. This latter aspect makes it possible to also recognise the value of continuity of cultural traditions in the territory's identity. In fact, if on one hand it is possible to recognise the difficulties in transferring these events, on the other hand it is equally clear that one of their more interesting aspects is linked to their inheritance, which inevitably will have to connect in a more or less critical manner with the present territorial reality. For these reasons, the analysis of artistic events in public spaces makes it possible to reflect on transformation processes of territorial systems both when they are an expression of real renewal and when they are only illusory.

This contribution is also affected by general circumstances. In fact, to some extent uncertainties related to the crisis of the European Union take their toll: an institutional, economic and financial crisis that produces some analytical disorientation. It is a crisis that has appreciable effects on the spatial aspects of the processes of interdependence between the various European and world regions, which in recent decades have profoundly affected the identities of the individuals and populations involved. This reference to a context of crisis is not simple background, but rather actively intervenes, especially in relation to territorial transformations. This certainly also applies to the reality of Cittadellarte, a protagonist in organising residences for international artists and at the same time a reality that symbolically demonstrates the existence of possible links between the dynamics that come from the organisation of artistic events and more general processes of territorial crisis and regeneration.

The analysis starts from the essential nature of geography: the representation of terrestrial phenomena. This makes it possible to propose an operational interpretation: the “relationship between the descriptive and the regulatory is a relationship of implication in the sense that the first contains the second, or, at least, its necessity”.<sup>1</sup> For this reason a reflection on three axes is proposed. The first regards Cittadellarte and its spatial configurations, proposing an inductive approach in the belief that some specifics of Cittadellarte can be a stimulus for geographical reflection. The second axis involves the presentation of some issues such as interpretive theses not to be proven but to be discussed. In fact, an analysis of some Biella territorial dynamics reveals some very interesting paradoxes. The third axis represents the analysis dealing with the critical phase of globalisation, to understand if and how the crisis of spatial structures at the global level is also applicable to the reality considered. From this point of view it is possible to consider the production of artistic events in public spaces as a component of a more complex territorial production process.

<sup>1</sup> Angelo Turco, *Configurazioni della territorialità*. Milan: Angeli, 2010, p. 103

## **SPATIAL TRANSFORMATIONS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES**

Therefore the hypothesis of the analysis is the Cittadellarte residences are an emblematic case of changing artistic geography and the role played by a multiplicity of cultural works aimed at characterising a path of development and transformation. These residencies are presented as dynamic with varied and densely structured artistic works, but at the same time represent a deep crisis in their phase of territorial reconfiguration, understood as the result of complex spatial and social dynamics that integrate into changing forms. This approach does not allow a mere rational analysis of the artistic events in the space as if they were determined by the local area (particularly the environmental aspects), but makes it possible to analyse them as they are made in a social context that is an expression of power relationships linked to a territory and binding the same.<sup>2</sup> So the territorial transformation becomes an event that is both of geographic and social interest, rising as a territorialized political project from which emerge the co-operative or conflicting practices of differ-

<sup>2</sup> Pietro Rossi, *Modelli di città. Strutture e funzioni politiche*, Turin: Einaudi, 1987

ent entities that work for its material and symbolic development. In analysing these events it is necessary to constantly recall their double nature: process and project. This nature exists in a global circumstance (particularly European) in which the institutional crisis has important repercussions for the various territorial identities and a general misalignment between the process and design dimensions of territorial transformations.

One possible interpretation is that the artistic experiences of these residences have intensified their local territorial relationships, simultaneously expanding their relationships of international artistic production through a challenging process of artistic regeneration. This regeneration process has seen the curious combination of a recovery of traditional cultural values (related to wool production) with a constant drive towards internationalisation. The characteristics mentioned are found in a marginal area of the vast urbanised Po region, where one can find both phenomena of low spatial integration, as in the case of public transportation, and phenomena of economic interdependence, as in the case of some centres of production. Moreover we are witnessing the failure of the traditional functional division of territory, with the emergence of a different settlement geography that is not always easily recognisable. In fact, the industrial crisis, the relocation of production and administrative rationalisations, have produced a significant number of abandoned areas, which in only a few cases have been targeted for repurposing and redevelopment, while many others reflect the stalled relations between different groups of power, not only local.



An element that is of great interest in the analysis of these geographical artistic events in Biella is that of demographics, which has seen particularly significant structural changes not so much in quantity as in qualitative aspects, finding important changes in family composition and the growing difference between the elderly majority of the Italian component and the youthful dominance of the immigrant component. These aspects have important spatial implications: from the use of the territory to meet the needs of production and socialisation to the representation of the same to assert personal identities.

The changes in Biella in recent decades, starting with the repurposing of abandoned industrial areas, are visible in the artistic works of the Cittadellarte residences. In fact, these processes of spatial reuse involve various forms of social exclusion and inclusion that have the same hold on local social cohesion. However the narrative of local entrepreneurship seems to avoid the confrontation with the changed territorial and functional relationships produced in recent decades, while the art projects follow the dominant power relationships and appear unwilling to welcome different social relationships, almost obsessively recalling the values of local tradition.

It is interesting to reflect on the social dimension of these transformations. In fact, on one hand the business component emerges, which strongly reaffirms its role as producer of space and territory. On the other hand it is possible to distinguish the difficulty with which the most marginal population seeks

to assert its presence in the local area, while ancient social practices - initially agricultural and subsequently industrial - are forgotten.

These social dynamics imply spatial issues when the artistic events that affect them are confined to their simple juxtaposition, while the territorial processes underline more or less latent tensions that can occur in strongly conflicted geographic discontinuities.

In summary, the artistic works associated with territorial transformations highlight some apparent contradictions in the geographical analysis. The first concerns the dissolution of the relationship between urban development and wool production. This does not simply highlight the industrial crisis, but more significantly the social relationships of the territory. Therefore, the second concerns the relationship between the urban centre and its surroundings, where the latter is gradually abandoned while the centre is unable to exercise its function of government. Finally, the third highlights the urban centre and its functions, experiencing a sometimes chaotic dispersion of the primary activities that have traditionally characterised it, without being able to renew itself with new territorializing functions.

This summary allows the following reflections. The first recognises the ability of artistic events to express local social relationships in some way, being able to connect to local planning, though they are unlikely to deflect it or generate a new plan. The second reflection recognises the possibility of producing both material and symbolic effects that are both temporary and ongoing, recognisable in territorial imbalances as a result of its process of social exclusion or inclusion<sup>3</sup>, more easily connected to the global dimension than the local one.

Some of the questions mentioned relate to territorial tensions linked to economic and social changes, which produce inevitable contradictions and paradoxes, while others require different analytical tools. In this context we see the need for new tools, even conceptual ones, able to grasp the seemingly paradoxical territorial changes and recognising discontinuity at the point of crisis.

One of the concepts that may need to be re-adapted to geographical analysis is that of the occluding.<sup>4</sup> In fact, this concept is related to the perception of persistence, which would offer tools to understand the perception of invisible phenomena and territorial processes.

The occluding edge was conceived as an ecological approach to visual perception by the American psychologist not only in relation to how the environment in which one lives is perceived - in terms of surfaces, layout, colours, textures, etc - but also in relation to the perception of where one is in relation to the environment. Only with this perception is an understanding possible that allows concrete actions of transformation, from the simplest to the most complex. To this concept is connected that of affordance, taken up once again

<sup>3</sup> Claude Raffestin, "Potere e territorialità", in Raffestin C. (editor), *Geografia politica: terre per un progetto sociale*. Milan: Unicopli, 1983

<sup>4</sup> James J. Gibson, *The change from visible to invisible: A study of optical transition*. State College, Pennsylvania: Psychological Cinema Register, 1986

in recent years in various fields of research. This concept refers to the intrinsic qualities of an object, extensible to the entire territory in spatial, botanical, structural, social terms, etc.<sup>5</sup>, that can inspire in a human being the appropriate actions for its use<sup>6</sup>.

The experience of the artists at Cittadellarte has had the merit of dealing with the territorial dimension in a transdisciplinary manner thanks to the concept of affordance, starting with the first experience of “path in the dark woods”, during which its absence was experienced. It was an experience that wanted to go beyond the cognitive dimension in its interaction with the environment, through which the context in one is located can be decoded and reconstructed in terms of meaning. At the conclusion of this work it is evident that the complexity of the local territory and its possible development projects cannot be considered only for its environmental, social, economic components, but also for its affordances, able to indicate to the various actors the way they must act: the project in terms of process.

The recognition of the different potentialities of the local territory by individuals depends on how the former are perceived by the latter. As Gibson understood that the vision must be contextualised, territorial analysis also needs to not be simply defined by a spatial point of view, a point of view defined by the coordinates of three vectors, but rather by all that constitutes the local territory, evidently formed by substances, stories, projects, social relations, natural forces, etc, which can manifest themselves in various ways and be transmitted through different media: for example the atmosphere for light, dominant narratives for the story. Moreover, all these materials can be distinguished only if they recognise the surfaces that separate them from the medium. Similarly to the substances, the surfaces can also vary in a more or less considerable way.<sup>7</sup> As the view must be studied in the context and conditions in which it has evolved, the local territory can be studied only by taking into consideration its changing character and cannot be separated from its occluding edge. As the view is obstructed by the edges, so the analysis of the local territory is limited by “corners”, “edges” and “bends” of the social, historical and economic type. In the hypothetical case of a “perfectly disordered” terrestrial surface, all parts of a surface would be projected on all points of observation. But in the reality of a territory, which has elements that overlap or that emerge with greater persistence, or that recalls historical events and incidents with greater emphasis, it is inevitable that an occluding edge separates what is directly perceptible from that which is not. At the same time the occluding edge is what connects the two parts.

Another key feature of this concept is that it is potentially reversible. In fact, the surface hidden from a certain point of observation might not be hidden from another. Moreover, these surfaces are also potentially interchangeable: the one that is revealed by a movement can be hidden by the opposite movement (of the observed object, the observer or the source of illumination), similar to the formal relationships theorised by Gestalt. In territorial terms, it

<sup>5</sup> Augustine Berque, *A. Médiante de milieux en paysages*. Montpellier: Géographiques Reclus, 1990 & Ellena Battaglini, *Sviluppo territoriale. Dal disegno della ricerca alla valutazione dei risultati*. Milan: Franco Angeli, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> James J. Gibson, *The ecological approach to visual perception*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979.

<sup>7</sup> Gibson, 1968

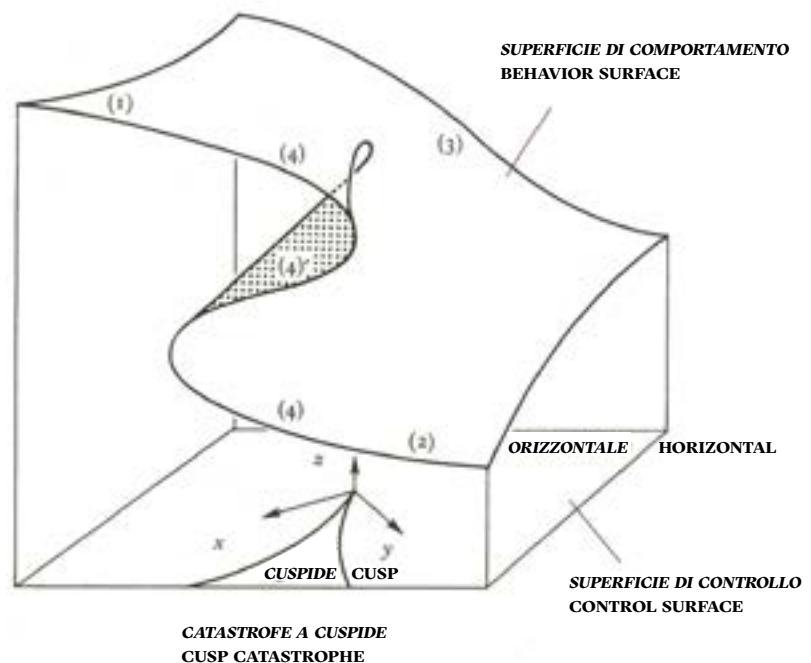
is possible to imagine that the expansion of a region produces the reduction of a neighbouring area, but changing the point of observation you might observe an expansion in the opposite direction of the area, which at first had been reduced. In the context of the work of Cittadellarte this phenomenon has been sensed with regard to the relationship between the rural and the industrial lands: changing the point of reference the area was viewed from, the sides could be at the same time the marginal areas of industrial activities or the central areas of rural activities.

The experiences of the artists at Cittadellarte made it possible to understand this characteristic in an emblematic way, comparing the different pathways. The final work of the artists who were more likely to “contaminate” their experience showed a greater capacity to understand the territorial complexity (Bahar Habibi and Anna Bromley). In contrast, the works of the artists having a more rigid approach showed greater simplification of the territorial context (Lorenza Ippolito and Lia Krücken, *Exploration - Where is Oropa?*). This observation, seemingly trivial, is extremely useful in confirming the need for a more fluid approach to the analysis and understanding of territorial phenomena and artistic events seeking to relate to them. In fact, in comparing the different artistic experiences not only have there been attempts to understand the local territory by those who tried to change their point of view and those who tried to change the subject’s point of illumination, both cases conceiving the local territory as a static object, but there were also those who considered the changes in the territory, recognising it as an active subject undergoing a process of territorialisation. This approach requires the acceptance by the observer that his capacity alone to change his point of view is insufficient, given that he cannot control the change of the occluding edge.

From Paleocontinental geological formations to industrial development and then on to self-salvation communities, where what is common is that which brings together in a single identity the ethnic, spiritual and territorial characteristics of its members

(Esposito, 2006)<sup>8</sup>, Biella has experienced a large number of territorial phenomena (social, economic, cultural, geological, industrial, etc) recognisable by the edges that have simultaneously occluded part of their continuous variation.

Understanding the changes that occur in a phenomenon that cannot be observed because it is occluded is possible thanks to the imagination, which, in the case of territorial phenomena, has an exquisitely geographical dimension.



Pomian, K. “Catastrofi”-The topological concept of catastrophe, in *Enciclopedia. Vol. II. Turin: Einaudi 1977, p. 789-803.*

<sup>8</sup> Roberto Esposito, *Communitas. Origine e destino delle comunità*, Turin: Einaudi, 2006.

It is the imagination necessary at the occluding edge that introduces a second tool, potentially fruitful for understanding the phenomena: the topological concept of catastrophe.<sup>8</sup> This concept was used to understand structural stability and can be particularly useful in the analysis of those phenomena that can change shapes, but which remain fundamentally unchanged in structure (Johanna Bratel, Bahar Habibi, Vittoria Soddu in collaboration with Anna Bromley, *I love you customer, temporary corporate banner, multimedia installation and performance*, Biella, 2015).

**8** René Thom. *Stabilità strutturale e morfogenesi*. Italian translation. Turin: Einaudi, 1980

The occluding edges prevent the direct observation of part of the phenomena considered, but at the same time make it possible to distinguish them and to perceive them as stable or as in transformation. The disturbances of a territorial system are numerous even if it is perceived as stable. The inability or impossibility of observing these factors produces the perception of different transformations, that if manifested suddenly and drastically can be considered catastrophes, capable of distorting the apparent course of events.

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**5** CHAPTER  
CITTADELLARTE

by Wayne W.J. Lim

# Shifting Consciousness

# Singapore Exceptionalism as place-making? <sup>3</sup>

## SINGAPORE: THE POINT OF TRANSACTIONS

In 2014, as part of the series titled, *The Happy Times*, I wrote an article bearing the headline, *Indonesia Rejects Singapore's Batam Acquisition Proposal*, dated in the future of 2060. This hypothetical acquisition plan made by Singapore to the Indonesian government underlined Singapore's endeavor to bring Batam under its control in the hope of fully controlling the other end of the Singapore Strait. Through this speculation, the intention was to solve Singapore's issue of the lack of land-space altogether — that has caused numerous territorial disputes with notably Malaysia and Indonesia — by naively purchasing an island from the southern neighbour. In that scenario, the proposal was rejected.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the matter was much more intricate than that. Indeed, for Singapore to gain control on both sides of the strait, would not just grossly widen the island-nation's 14th century narrative of Temasek, a prosperous trading island before British colonial history, it would conceivably allow Singapore to grow its population — or quite literally, expand in every possible, imaginable way. It is about trade, it is even more so about transactions; Singapore as the point of transactions for resources, goods, services and human capital.

<sup>1</sup> <https://thehappytimesblog.wordpress.com/2013/09/25/indonesian-rejects-batam-acquisition-proposal/>

In reality, this lack-of-land issue is in some ways impermanently resolved by relentless land reclamation projects. Back then however, there was a general





An unpublished map of Singapore mainland and Batam Island: a hypothetical acquisition, by Wayne W.J. Lim, 2015

consensus and understanding of the massive land reclamation works. It was something that entered the minds of many Singaporeans and many understood early national-building projects—in quite a literal sense—that were, and still are necessary for the development and progress of the island-nation. When Singapore separated from Malaysia in 1965, the leaders of Singapore (chiefly late Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew) knew that Singapore has no natural resources to depend on. With Singapore's thriving entrepôt trade—due to the fact that it nestles at the tip of mainland Southeast Asia, strategically located along major maritime trade routes between the East and West—whether refined petroleum or gas, nothing was really beyond reach, except sand and water. Both of these raw materials are reclaimed through their respective means.

Sand is used mainly for land reclamation as well as for construction of housing, commercial, infrastructural and transportation projects around the island. Over the years, Singapore's relentless reclamation efforts to expand its physical land space has caught the attention of her wary neighbours. From colonial times to the present, Singapore has grown by roughly 22% of its original size. Despite the ban on sand from neighbouring countries from as early as the 1990s, various government-linked-companies (GLCs) based in Singapore continue to engage in dubious transactions, like one from the island of Koh Kong where the sand was dredged from the sea off the island of Cambodia. Sometimes, transactions are even conducted on international waters.<sup>2</sup> The prices of sand imported by Singapore have risen dramatically over the years from US\$3 per tonne to US\$190 per tonne.<sup>3</sup> In 2014, Singapore was the world's top importer of sand, amounting to US\$279 million.<sup>4</sup> Without a doubt, this sand issue is a matter of national security for the Singapore government, since it is this important material that has allowed Singapore to grow exponentially over earlier decades.

Similarly, water is also and has been one of several contentious issues with Malaysia. Singapore at the moment maintains and controls several water pumps and reservoirs in Johor—the Malaysian state immediately north of Singapore—and claims to provide roughly half of the water consumed.<sup>5</sup> Once again, to solve

<sup>2</sup> <http://news.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne+News/Malaysia/Story/A1Story20100624-223708.html>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nextbigfuture.com/2015/03/global-sand-use-for-building-larger.html>

<sup>4</sup> Simones, Alexander. Observatory of Economic Complexity [http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree\\_map/hs92/import/sgp/show/2505/2014/](http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/visualize/tree_map/hs92/import/sgp/show/2505/2014/). Media Lab, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. 2012

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.academia.edu/1412271/MALAYSIA-SINGAPORE\\_RELATIONS\\_ISSUES\\_AND\\_STRATEGIES](https://www.academia.edu/1412271/MALAYSIA-SINGAPORE_RELATIONS_ISSUES_AND_STRATEGIES)

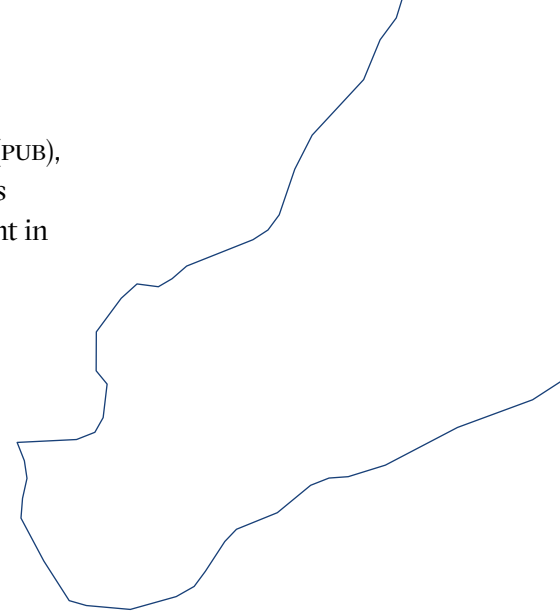
the insolvable, Singapore's national water agency, the Public Utility Board (PUB), initiated a water reclamation programme in 1998 called NEWater as well as desalination plants around the island, that aims to see Singapore self-reliant in water by the end of the water agreement, which will end in 2061.

### FROM POSTCOLONIAL NATIONALISM TO EXCEPTIONALISM

Singaporean artist Debbie Ding questions the possibility of “bringing the Singapore River back into public consciousness”. She writes, “the Singapore River is a site of historical and commercial significance for Singapore, as well as a site to socialise at and dream of things to come. Where urban Singapore is concerned, it is hard to speak of any outstanding natural physical features that remain, besides the Singapore River; the site of Singapore's genesis. When prompted to reflect on the river, many find it hard to recall the geography of Singapore's most significant river – which has changed drastically in purpose, form, and colour over the last hundred years. Is it easy to overlook the river because it is small?”<sup>6</sup> Whenever history or culture is concerned, the limitations prevail unquestionably and take on a different form; psychologically or only through recent (cultural) memories. The absence of land-space consciousness over the actual limitations of the physicality of land and space is called into question here. So, where has the notion of territoriality moved to?

The tale of postcolonial Singapore is often the story of how the nation went from third world to first world. Immediately after the expulsion of Singapore in 1965, although the essential matter back then was to survive, another urgency arose, which was the separation that caused a ramp-up of nationalistic awareness and created an consciousness that was separate from Malaysia: a Singapore identity. Lee Kuan Yew knew what he wanted, he wanted Singapore to be exceptional, not just exceptional from Malaysia but also from the other Southeast Asian nations.<sup>7</sup> As he explained, “to succeed, Singapore must be a cosmopolitan centre, able to attract, retain, and absorb talent from all over the world. Singapore is now a brand name. My greatest satisfaction comes from mustering the will to make this place meritocratic, corruption-free and equal for all races — and that it will endure beyond me.”<sup>8</sup> Under his stewardship, he devised a multicultural, meritocratic national consciousness, with the merger of English as the official language and platform, creating a level playing field for this diverse nation.

Being Asia's success story — as one of the four Asian Tigers — Singapore



<sup>6</sup> <http://www.dbbd.sg/works/psychogeographical-faultline.php>



**The Singapore River as Psychogeographical Faultline by Debbie Ding, at the ArtScience Museum, 2011.**

<sup>7</sup> Long, Simon. *The Singapore Exception*. <http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21657606-continue-flourish-its-second-half-century-south-east-asias-miracle-city-state>. The Economist. Jul. 18, 2015.

<sup>8</sup> <http://time.com/3748654/singapore-lee-kuan-yews-opinions/>

became a brand with its tenets and politics of governance, exceptionalism and pragmatism that has been applauded by one of China's most prominent leaders, Deng Xiaoping, who invited GLCs from Singapore to — quite literally — govern a whole new city in China. Starting in 1994, a government-level administrative area called the Suzhou Industrial Park (SIP) was launched where Singapore developed an area of 70 square kilometers, but later reduced to eight square kilometers due to the depreciation of shares after failing to see profit.<sup>9</sup> Despite that, in 2007, the agreement for Tianjin Eco-City was signed and subsequently, in 2010, for Guangzhou Knowledge-City, which is scheduled for completion in early 2017.<sup>10</sup> Most recently, it was announced that the new capital city in the state of Andhra Pradesh in India, which is ten times the size of Singapore, will be built and led by Singapore-based companies.<sup>11</sup> The mental image of the leaders of the respective countries selecting sites for city-building eminently mirrors the historical narrative of Sir Stamford Raffles' founding of modern Singapore.

This form of exceptionalism has mentally shifted Singapore's extraterritorial strategy from a materially constrained one, to a psychogeographical<sup>12</sup> one, after having acquired its modern world class status through educating and activating the labour force that best suited Singapore's economic structure.

For Singapore, the adaptation of exceptionalism — from the notion of American Exceptionalism — has not just spelled economic diplomacy and economic regionalism but has allowed continuity and transformation of Singapore's national-public consciousness.<sup>13</sup> As the highly-skilled and educated workforce no longer feels the old constraints regarding the broader notion of land space — although this is not to deny the actual constraints of space within the country itself — it will always be a problem for as long as the narrative of the state is geographically bounded and geopolitically fixated.

#### **EXTRATERRITORIAL PROJECTS AND NEW POLITICAL IMAGINATIONS?**

Undeniably, economic integration within the European Union is a form of economic regionalism. However, one could not help but to agree or recognise that Biella had slipped through the cracks of economic integration and failed to reap rewards. This situation in turn generated certain self-sustainable mechanisms, with the Cittadellarte - Fondazione Pistoletto as one of the actors facilitating the informal economy in the Biellese territories. Singapore on the other hand, is on the complete opposite side of the spectrum, precariously in full dependence on the global economy, politics and financial markets. The practice of economic regionalism in all four extraterritorial projects in China and India were heavily invested in and led by major Singapore-based GLCs, therefore, one can call into question whether this is a form of — or rather, an informal form of — territorial expansion, which exists in various different ways.

Yet, to put it into perspective, the geopolitical climate and history of Southeast

<sup>9</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20060512193509/http://www.sfdonline.org/Link%20Pages/Link%20Folders/Other/suzhou3.html>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/regional/2015-07/04/content\\_21249214.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/regional/2015-07/04/content_21249214.htm)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/public-leaders-network/2015/jan/07/singapore-building-india-city-andhra-pradesh>

<sup>12</sup> Psychogeography could set for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals. The adjective psychogeographical, retaining a rather pleasing vagueness, can thus be applied to the findings arrived at by this type of investigation, to their influence on human feelings, and even more generally to any situation or conduct that seems to reflect the same spirit of discovery. <http://library.nothingness.org/articles/si/en/display/2>

<sup>13</sup> <https://singaporepolicyjournal.com/2015/11/02/can-singapore-be-both-the-exception-and-the-rule/>

Asia is different from Europe and the European Union. As Southeast Asia is mainly separated by the sea, nations and the national consciousness are thus maintained and have remained rather distinct historically, as compared to continental Europe where many modern European nations have a direct lineage to the Roman Empire. The sheer closeness of culture is undeniable, unlike the Southeast Asia conglomeration, where dominating political culture and religion flourished, waned and sometimes revived at different historical times and was recently rewritten anew through colonialism. For example, although almost all of mainland Southeast Asia and the Malay archipelagos were Indianised empires, only Thailand, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia continue to use their respective languages that came from the same linguistic ancestry as Sanskrit. While Malaysia and Indonesia have been Islamised, both have used Roman alphabets since colonial rule. Vietnam on the other hand, was using Chinese characters until the French Romanised the written form, despite sharing the same colonial narrative with Laos and Cambodia as Indochina. The point here is to lay out the overlaps and insidious vernacular mapping of Southeast Asia and analyse why Singapore's geopolitical understanding and economic regionalism extended everywhere else but Southeast Asia? The further lack of distinctive history and cultural similarities with other Southeast Asian countries compelled Singapore to play the friendly ex-colony card with the West in order to gain edge and propel itself as the hub and centre of Southeast Asia.

If the question back then was geographical, cultural and linked materially to resources, is it possible to then (re)envision a future political imagination — a conceivable speculation — that is neither constrained by the belief of territoriality or the national/state in the light of today's neoliberal-nationalist crises?

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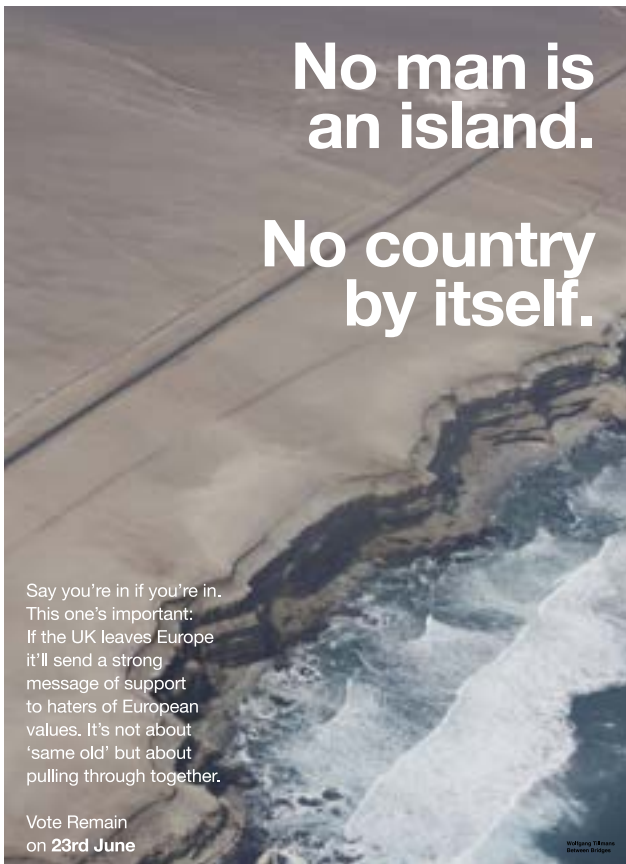
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by **Andrew Friend**

# To what End, Paradise? Notes for an island



A tall man in a white suit standing in the sunset on the shore. In his hands he holds objects of a remarkable complexity, surely these are not the product of man, such wonders, technological marvels. These can only be things from another realm, gifts from the ancestors, artefacts to be revered above anything else, such precious cargo. Over time the news of these developments spreads, through networks of communication, technology

Poster designed for the pro-EU/ anti-Brexit campaign, 2016”

at once item and myth spreading and purporting its own worth. Gradually movements form and cultures develop, a new localism<sup>1</sup> derived from the article itself and also the promise it delivers, technology indistinguishable from magic<sup>2</sup>. A tool offering a sense of freedom, be it through accessibility, mastery,

<sup>1</sup> Localism – de-centralised region or local centric approach, see also UK Localism Act 2011

<sup>2</sup> Clarke A. *Hazards of Prophecy: The Failure of Imagination*, 1973

or even transparency. On occasion the man was seen again, at least according to those who were there at the time. The promise of the cargo reiterated and refreshed in the collective imagination. Driving aspiration and desire, binding an identity of place through shared will to possess and realise these objects, bringing wealth and prosperity to the island.

On the 5th July 1774 British explorer James Cook landed the HMS Resolution on the south pacific island of Tanna, naming the islands now known as Vanuatu the 'New Hebrides' surveying and claiming them for the British crown. From one island to another, the borders of a small island in the north Atlantic extended to the shores of this tropical island paradise deep in the southern Pacific. Through these 'discoveries' and claims the concept of the island becomes a more fluid notion. What was physically contained or separated from its surrounds by its geographic situation is also constructed through the psychology and mindsets of those who experience it, both native and alien to it - the explorer, or outsider, the individual looking in. In this way the scale of the island is relative to the known - i.e. that which is understood and realised by the inhabitants and indeed visitors, whilst conceptually existing as a framework, a set of ideas and notions, running parallel to the physical. This ideology in turn can be reinforced through the creation, collection and dissemination of artefacts, things from or arriving on the island, fragments purporting to tell and disseminate the story, myth and existence of such a place, thus extending its borders in the minds of those who are aware of its existence.

Meanwhile in Europe many young men from the island in the north Atlantic were embarking on their own personal explorations, across the English channel to the mainland in search of culture, embarking on their journeys, an individual quest taking in the popular cities and high society of mainland Europe as part of the romantic grand tour, extolling the myth of a classical beauty whilst at the same time buying, commissioning and acquiring antiquities as a kind of inverse cargo to bring back to the island. This classical and revivalist 'cargo' was brought to the island along with a sense of fabricated nostalgia, an idealised vision of classical perfection, something at which to strive for, yet ultimately does, and cannot exist, an alternative island, out of reach.

The cargo or technology which we so desire can be viewed as a microcosmic representation of the island, or the land. In so much as it holds the promise of the gods, be it through representation of classical perfection, pillaged and brought from one place and supplanted in another or the means, or tool with which to plot one's escape. One's own journey either travelling towards a supposed paradise or utopia, or creating this in one's own surround. Technology forms a belief system, a way of living. Agricultural practices can start to re-interpret the land as technology, individuals re-addressing their direct relationship with the landscape in a very littoral way.<sup>3</sup> There is however an element of escapism here and the questions regarding scalability and sustainability of such approaches over a larger scale do not tend to be addressed, or remain to be seen beyond the idealistic view, rooted in a nostalgic sense of tradition and history.

**3** Re-investiture in agricultural technologies, for instance Permaculture, engaging organic and sustainable methods, most often contained at a small scale <https://www.permaculture.org.uk/>

The will to escape and extend beyond our 'known' and everyday to explore and inhabit is perpetuated through these traditions and the folklore and tales from the past. There is a romantic idealism attuned to the individual immersed in the landscape, or indeed immersed in a natural sublime.<sup>4</sup> The exploits of these characters are recounted through popular culture that is seared into the collective imagination fulfilling the desire to venture beyond the island, crossing the borders imposed upon us as part of this quest for a sort of fulfilment.

At an individual scale this can be achieved, presently technology and the tools available at our disposal do provide a lens to the future, to these distant lands, or even potentials. Where does the will to travel derive from? Is it simply not enough to be present in our direct situation? The scale of the island is constantly evolving, a mutable form from the nation state, or even constituent island - the individual<sup>5</sup> to the notional 'spaceship' earth<sup>6</sup> travelling through the cosmos as a mechanism containing and through its occupation and maintenance, sustaining life.

Perhaps it is a motion to the very very far away<sup>7</sup> that drives us beyond our current states, and our terrestrial bind. Advanced technologies are making the prospect of venturing beyond our earthen landscape a real possibility. There is a shift in ownership also. The rights in space and possession of extraterrestrial bodies are bound up by the 1967 Outer Space Treaty<sup>8</sup> which states that, 'Outer space, including the Moon and other celestial bodies, is not subject to national appropriation by claim of sovereignty, by means of use or occupation, or by any other means.'<sup>9</sup> As such no nation state is able to own anywhere in space, however due to the commercial proliferation of extraterrestrial ventures, and privatised space exploration we have a new occupation and ownership of artefacts, new islands formed from technological devices occupying space, forming new territories beyond the realms of the nation state. This post national view is manifest in the creation of Asgardia<sup>10</sup>, a privately backed utopian vision for a new extraterrestrial nation; dual citizenship can be applied for whilst on earth and once 100,000 citizenship applications are received the state can apply for official United Nations recognition. Technology/cargo, once more fuelling a collective idealism and forging a togetherness, science fiction becoming scientific and social reality.

The creation of one's own state or place is not unique in scale to the extra terrestrial, the micro-nation enjoying specific status as a result of geographical positioning. Individuals have made, created and inhabited their own insular nation states, from the hedonistic 'Isola delle Rosa'<sup>11</sup> situated 500 metres clear of Italian territorial waters to the North Sea Principality 'Sealand'<sup>12</sup> situated just clear of the British coastline. What constitutes these places and defines them in addition to their physicality is the concept and place of these in the imagination, these micronations as island containers for our dreams and ideas, a place where (indeed in the case of L'isola delle Rosa) one's wildest dreams and fantasies could take place. The island as construct for fantasy does not even have to extend offshore, the view that 'an Englishman's home is his castle'

**4** Snow Storm – *Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth making Signals in Shallow Water, and going by the Lead. The Author was in this Storm on the Night the Ariel left Harwich*, Turner J.M.W., Oil on Canvas, 91×122cm, 1842

**5** Tillmans W. *EU Campaign*, 2016 <http://tillmans.co.uk/campaign-euMEDITATION XVII>, "No man is an island....", *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, Donne J. 1624

**6** *Operating Manual For Spaceship Earth*, Buckminster Fuller R. 1968

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**9** p.11 United Nations Treaties and Principles on Outer Space, United Nations, New York, 2002

**10** <https://asgardia.space/en/page/concept>

**11** Micro-nation, 44,10'48"N 12,37'00"E, Adriatic Sea, Declaration of Independence 1st May, 1968, Dissolution Feb 1969

**12** Micro-nation, 51,53'42.6"N 1,28'49.8"E, North Sea, Declaration of Independence 1967



purports this ideology, one's home becoming a citadel within the landscape where the owner, or master holds court and sets the tone for the place. In socio-economic terms this starts to get a little conflicted where the wealthiest individuals are in turn those with the most power over their place, resulting in the traditionalist invention of environments<sup>13</sup> through to the creation of classical behemoths to modernist utopia.

The island becomes an embodiment of a paradise, a vessel for dreaming and a place where some of these ideas might come true. The search for these places and constant will to create or realise can lead to a cycle of attempting and ultimately failing to realise the ultimate goal. As you move closer to paradise it moves further away, can we ever really reach this as a finite point? In this way 'paradises' shift, places that never were, but exist only in our imagination, points beyond our comprehension, places to aspire to but that are in actuality 'invisible'.<sup>14</sup>

The journey to demarcation to define and map the borders of the island becomes a challenging task, in particular in the present. The explorer charts the known, venturing around the edges, transforming an imagined landscape into new charted territory, this land always existed, however not necessarily in the minds of those who were not there. As we see more fluid or soft landscapes emerge through the blurring of boundaries between the digital and physical worlds this surveying becomes impossible,<sup>15</sup> the internet expanding at exponential rates, borders and territories taking on the transitory roles. The network can become technology for dissemination as well as technological territory, through the power of the media exerting its pressure on the definition of traditional 'physical' territory and states. The rise of political popularism across the globe owes no small debt to the power of this engine driving fake news articles, spreading fabricated figures<sup>16</sup> and detail to a population hungry for direction and frustrated by the status quo. The island here becomes a container for self, in the case of the small island in the north Atlantic a reassuring symbol of who we are, or rather who we might want to be, or even (nostalgically) want to become again. An flawed ideology trading off supposed values of an idealised golden age.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps it is how we choose to encounter and relate to the island, the potential of the paradise, that defines our identity within the landscape. The thrill of the unknown, the challenge of futures that we don't yet know how to define, allowing ourselves the opportunity to expand our own islands beyond their natural shores. Alongside this exuberance is the potential of the glitch, the inconceivable, and the terror of it actually happening.<sup>18</sup> Followed by the wait for what comes next.<sup>19</sup>

When asked about this mysterious man on the shore, and when he will return heavy with the promised cargo the islander replied; "He has not come in more than 60 years,"

**13** Poundbury, Dorset, England, built by HRH Prince Charles to the values of an imagined 'traditional' England, his own model society, mixing stylistic cues and urban design ideas in a corner of the larger island that he will one day 'inherit'.

**14** Ile de sable, New Caledonia, Phantom Island, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/22/sandy-island-missing-google-earth>

**15** <http://www.no-mans-sky.com/> Science fiction game set within generative constantly expanding virtual environment

**16** £350 million a week promised to National Health Service by Leave Campaign politicians <http://news.sky.com/story/lets-see-the-163350m-for-the-nhs-say-mps-10630640>

**17** <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/sep/07/pro-eu-protest-planned-for-last-night-of-the-proms>

**18** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ma3SAUqnUMA> UK Independence Party Leader Nigel Farage, speech 23rd June 2016

**19** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hnnozfe6jk>, UK Prime Minister Theresa May, Speech on Brexit Plan, 17th Jan 2017

“Don't you think that's a rather long time?,” asked the explorer

“I can wait,” he said, “ for you have waited over two thousand years for your cargo, for me 60 years is not so long” Technology as tool and artefact, belief source and binder, a means to paradise.

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## 7 CHAPTER PUBLIC ROOM

by Aleksandar  
Velinovski

# Manifesto for Use and Reuse of Public Properties

Responding to the themes of the project Understanding Territoriality: Identity, Place and Possession, Otvorena Soba is highlighting its work in private and public places and spaces, their use and reuse in social and creative innovation, art and culture. We touch on possession via territoriality, violation or invasion of territories and how local people react to those changes. Here we explore three different case studies in Macedonia, two urban and one rural example: Public Room Design Centre, Recycled City and Chapel for Nature.

### **PUBLIC ROOM DESIGN CENTRE**

Abandoned industrial buildings can be ugly and produce waste, they can sit empty and unused for decades, becoming nothing more than an eyesore. But they can also be repurposed into attractive and useful buildings and be of use to the whole of society.

Adaptive reuse of industrial heritage plays an important role in promoting art, culture and the creative industries in Europe and worldwide. The trend that commenced in the 1980s in Los Angeles and New York rapidly spread through the whole of Western Europe. The same trend of reusing industrial spaces has recently penetrated Balkan countries, some of them to a greater extent, while others are yet to feel the benefits of this model.



**Abandoned industrial building** - built by a Serbian architect in 1930 as stables for the Serbian army. During the Yugoslavian era and several years after, it was a military warehouse and finally completely abandoned for the last 20 years, in the period of transition from socialism to capitalism. *Photo credits: Tamara Georgievska*

There are a few bright examples of transformation or reuse of industrial spaces that radiate success to the extent that they have started to be recognised even by local and central governments, who have asked managers of these organisations to become advisors/consultants and generate new similar projects in their countries and abroad. This was inconceivable a few years ago, since it took ages, enormous energy and time invested in lobbying, to convince the policy makers that transformation of abandoned buildings into open, social centres was beneficial for citizens, society and the economy.



A recent example of a reused industrial heritage building in Skopje is Public Room – a centre for design and innovation. It is a multi-purpose, hybrid space spread over 1480 m<sup>2</sup> for the use of the art, cultural and creative industries sector. It has become known throughout the region for its unique approach. It is not only an art and design space, it is not only for co-working, not only a gallery, or a workshop/prototyping space - it is an assembly of creative people and a programme that fits with peoples' interests, triggering creativity and productivity especially among younger generations. Within 12 months the Public Room project has grown into a fully functional, self-sustainable model that produces a programme for all generations, aged 7 to 77, generating the income it needs to exist and grow.

**Public Room - a centre for design and innovation - working room.**  
*Photo credits: Tamara Georgievska*

The space is a social polygon consisting of free co-working space used during the day by the startup community and freelancers, conference rooms and work rooms that are used by vocational, educational and other organisations for training, seminars and performances and a makers' space where emerging designers from the whole of Europe come to work on their prototypes. Designers and emerging brands from Macedonia and the region are given space in the 'concept store' to sell on a commission basis: furniture, garments, jewellery, accessories, photos and organic cosmetics. The restaurant on the ground floor regularly hosts chefs from other countries in order to introduce new tastes to local people.



In other words the space is an amalgam of energies, programmes, operational and creative enthusiasm, and because of that it is always packed with people and is sustainable.

**Public Room - a centre for design and innovation - restaurant bar and free co-working place**  
*Photo credits: Tamara Georgievska*

The building which Public Room occupies was built by a Serbian architect in 1930 as stables for the Serbian army. During the Yugoslavian era and several years after, it was a military warehouse and finally completely abandoned for the last 20 years, in the period of transition from socialism to capitalism.

Changes in the system and reforms introduced by different governments have all played a part in leaving this once important structure in the centre of Macedonia's capital city redundant. Not that the current establishment recognised the strength of the idea when it was first presented to them - it took four years of lobbying and advocacy to convince the authorities to rent the space to a non-governmental organisation.

Despite local scepticism this abandoned space managed to boost the appeal of a relatively neglected area on the outskirts of central Skopje and has now become a cultural and social landmark. The recent growth in the construction of apartments and commercial spaces in the district - where real estate companies' sales campaigns are based on the fact that the apartments for sale are close to the Public Room design centre - proves the success of the project so far.



**Public Room - a centre for design and innovation - concept store (furniture, garments, jewellery, accessories, photos, organic cosmetics...)** *Photo credits: Tamara Georgievska*

**1** Urban ghosts is a term used to describe abandoned structures, which have great, but unrecognised potential

In Macedonia, the Balkans, and the whole of central and eastern Europe, there are massive industrial buildings, most of them very close to city centres, that are left unused for decades due to a lack of political will or ownership problems (urban ghosts<sup>1</sup>). Re-appropriating former factories and warehouses has now become accepted largely due to a few shining examples that have proved that the only bad model is neglecting them. The reuse of industrial buildings, initiated to preserve industrial heritage, develop creative hubs, social innovation centres or even as real estate property, presents some serious technical issues but gives these buildings a chance to survive. It brings an area to life again and brings progress into an entire district, city and country.

Spreading success stories about reused industrial buildings and related projects, analysing the processes, developing related technical-economical studies, and evaluation methods, can help save valuable buildings from demolition and secure economic and social progress. What is very important is to properly examine the reuse and the fresh context for the buildings by involving local citizens in the process from the beginning in order to avoid territorial tensions.



We acknowledge and celebrate progress progress but nevertheless hate to see often beautiful historical buildings demolished, whether or not they're abandoned, beyond economical repair or unable to fulfill their original roles in the 21st century. That's

**Public Room - a centre for design and innovation - restaurant bar, free co-working place, exhibition space.** *Photo credits: Tamara Georgievska*



why we advocate adaptive reuse - this is a process of adapting buildings and objects for purposes other than those for which they were designed, giving them a new lease of life, reducing urban sprawl and preserving history in a functional way.

The development of cities is determined by several geographical, social and economic elements. Social, economic and industrial-technological changes caused a significant proportion of American and Western European plants and factories to close in the last third of the 20th century. Often abandoned industrial areas were occupied by artists.<sup>2</sup> These initiatives became accepted, even trendy after the late 1970s, when market-based developments started up<sup>3</sup> and re-use projects become more and more popular.

One way of expressing national cultural identity is through architecture. It is logical that besides personal and domestic spaces, our immediate environment and, the city we live in, are the territories we feel emotionally mostly connected to. We see these environments every day, they represent our work, the way we communicate and our attitudes. While some political figures often attach campaigns and nationalistic propaganda to a city or national institutions, to monuments or sculptures located in public spaces, others neglect them unless they are the focus of a burning issue. In Skopje, where the city got a new facade with the project Skopje 2014, all parties were focused on new development and the message which new architecture delivers, whilst completely ignoring the immense potential of the city's industrial heritage. A group of smart architects managed to explore that capital and popularise it as a topic by simply mapping and promoting it in the form of a project 'Recycled City'.

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by **Bojan Karanakov**  
& **Ognen Marina**

# Recycled City

The topic of the 18th Biennale of Macedonian Architecture BIMAS 2016, organised by the Association of Architects of Macedonia, was Recycled Architecture.

The term recycling in this context refers to the need to offer new answers in relation to obsolete urban environments and programmes. Urban recycling, reconstruction and adaptation in these urban areas aims to reduce waste and to establish new relationships between the buildings and their altered surroundings through strategically devised restructuring.

Recycled Architecture reflects the profound debate over the desire to preserve our surroundings and the need to intervene and change them, which itself leads to a debate on the most suitable course of action.

The success of the city lies in its capacity to change, adapt and be reused over time without changing its inherent physical and ideological nature. Under the pressures of change and diverse interests, the city builds up its resilience over the course of time through inclusivity, absorbing all changes into a single unit, thereby enabling continuous potential and capacity for re-usage. These cycles of change are essential to an understanding of the cities we live in.

The project Recycled City as one of many BIMAS 2016 events was a network of architectural and artistic interventions in Skopje at locations which have already either undergone the process of recycling, are currently undergoing the process of recycling or have strong potential to be recycled in the future. The aim of the project was to provoke thinking and creative criticism about the



**Rethinking the parking space  
in front of Tinex market,  
Pero Nakov St.**  
*Photo credits: Angel Sitnovski*





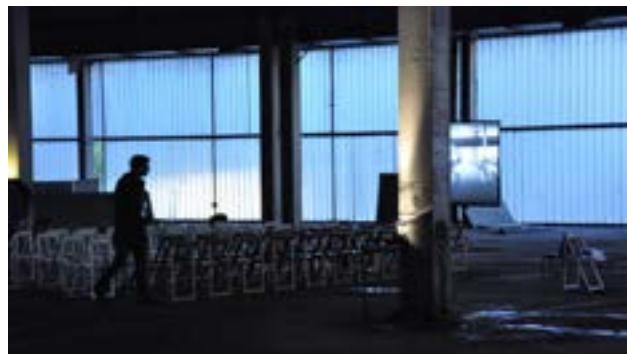
**Yellow stage, Ezerce restaurant, Skopje City Park.**  
*Photo credits: Angel Sitnovski*

processes which shape the city of Skopje. This included highlighting, designating, criticising, improving, replacing, adding, hiding, discovering, and many other strategies for intervening at eight different

locations throughout the city. The proposed locations were only a frame, i.e. areas of the city, spaces, locations or buildings which the curators selected by recognising the existence and activity of certain processes and phenomena or their potential for future recycling within the continuous existence of the city. The curators then invited a group of young architects and practicing architectural offices to intervene at one of the proposed locations.

These architectural and artistic interventions were conceived as acts of re-thinking, and recycling of primary city functions such as housing, public space, industry, trade, greenery, utilities, education, infrastructure, transport, culture, cultural heritage, sport and recreation, etc. The architectural and artistic interventions of Recycled City offered a clear conceptual frame for examining the city and pointing out in a critical and creative manner the views, processes, phenomena or conditions produced by recycling architecture and the city or the potential for future transformation.

At the end a bus tour for Biennale visitors was organised in order to visit all the interventions. At each site the authors gave a short verbal presentation, elaborating on each individual intervention. The interventions were minimal in size, but powerfully presented a series of ideas on recycling the city.



**Presentation programic transformation of the service building 'Mehanika', Mehanika Service building.**  
*Photo credits: Angel Sitnovski*

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ARCHITECTURAL / ARTISTIC INTERVENTIONS BY:

Bisera Krckovska - Evocative layers, Exhibition of Miniatures in the City Museum of City Skopje

ARHIPUNKT: Nevenka Mancheva, Marija Antikj Nikolova - Rethinking the parking space in front of Tinex market, Pero Nakov Street

Dejan Jovanovski, Filip Ivanovski - Fahrenheit Skopje, Fire fighters training tower

MARH: Martin Efremovski, Boris Jurmovski, Filip Koneski, Noemi Chausidis, Sofija Stojanoska, Monika Krstevska, Antonio Grujevski - Skopje Invisible Urbanism, The Contemporary Art Center

RADIUS ARCHITECTS: Martin Panovski, Aleksandar Naumcheski, Jana Gugulovska, Dushica Dinovska - Yellow stage, Ezerce Restaurant, Skopje City Park exhibit Skopje, Jana Konstantinova, Iva Shokoska, Railway workers building, Bunjakovec Katarina Nikolov, Layer cake Exhibition of photography, Mehanika Service building, Maksim Naumovski, Oliver Ilievski, Presentation Programatic transformation of the service building "Mehanika", Mehanika Service building.

**Exhibit Skopje, Railway workers building.**  
*Photo credits: Angel Sitnovski*



**Skopje Invisible Urbanism, The Contemporary Art Center.**  
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by **Bojan Karanakov**  
& **Ognen Marina**

# Chapel for Nature

## INTRODUCTION



When a particular territory is threatened or attacked, the people either defend it, attack the territory of the attacker, suffer the trauma of invasion, or change the rules of the territory. It is in the nature of humans as territorial animals, to think of evil as based on a violation of territory or territorial rights, and of good as based on an

opening up or giving up of territory or territorial rights. Among the things we consider evil are: destruction, damaging or appropriation of life and property, the breaking up of social ties and reputations.

Another project on territoriality and possession comes out of a slightly different context - our natural surroundings - and was showcased at the AFS International Summer school of Architecture in Kriva Palanka. Even though the architects managed to produce an elegant construction with the potential to place Kriva Palanka on the architectural world map because of its connection to renowned architect Sami Rintala, some local people, not knowing who Rintala was and unaware of its value, dismantled the entire building as a response to the perceived invasion of their territory. It was so rapidly dismantled, in fact, that the wider local population did not even have a chance to claim the building as their own.

**Chapel for nature - construction site in the forest of the Monastery of St. Joachim Osogovski**  
*Photo credits: Bojan Karanakov*



**Chapel for nature - construction site in the forest of the Monastery of St. Joachim Osogovski.** *Photo credits: Bojan Karanakov*



## CHAPEL FOR NATURE

For the past 25 years, at the beginning of July, the beautiful Monastery of St. Joachim Osogovski near Kriva Palanka has hosted the International Summer School of Architecture organised by the University of St. Cyril and Methodius Faculty of Architecture in Skopje.

The 23rd session of the Summer School was entitled Chapel for Nature. This architectural workshop was tutored by the renowned Finnish architect and Professor at the University of Trondheim Norway, Sami Rintala. Once again using the learning-by-doing methodology of two previous summer schools, architecture students had the opportunity to be involved in every phase of architectural design - from conceptualising and designing to actual building.

A group of 26 students from the Faculty of Architecture in Skopje, 10 students from different countries around the world at various European schools of architecture and three tutors from the Faculty spent seven days in an intensive educational, work and socio-cultural programme. Together, they designed and built a Chapel for Nature - a small room for a small group of people to come together and focus on/ respect/ praise the beauty of nature.

The Chapel was not intended to have any direct religious connotation. It was designed as a universal classroom - social in character but spiritual in atmosphere; very simple yet extremely complex. The main focus was in framing the views, its natural light, the orientation and positioning in the landscape and the use of materials, resulting in a small filtering space where people and nature were in balance.

The final design of the Chapel evolved along two topographic, landscape, organisational and symbolic intersecting axes - one parallel and the other perpendicular to the existing pathway leading to the nearby village. In formal terms, the Chapel consisted of seven wooden walls (six made by the six groups of students and one made by the teachers) positioned between several existing natural elements of the site such as trees and rocks. Made entirely with primitive hand tools, these seven Chapel walls defined a place in nature where visitors could sit down, relax, talk, meditate, and enjoy the beautiful view, rich vegetation and pleasant microclimate.

An intensive agenda and timetable, multilayered didactic plan as well as the thoughtful and well-organised work, offered participating students the opportunity to gain the skills of observing and imagining, design and construc-



Chapel for nature - construction site in the forest of the Monastery of St. Joachim Osogovski  
*Photo credits: Bojan Karanakov*



Chapel for nature - construction site in the forest of the Monastery of St. Joachim Osogovski  
*Photo credits: Bojan Karanakov*

tion methods and an opportunity to participate in lively discussions. They reflected on the role of contemporary architecture built from natural materials and made using traditional techniques. By attending the Summer School the students had an exceptional opportunity to work alongside and learn from a world-renowned architect with a striking personality, who is an outstanding professional and teacher.

Mutual satisfaction with the results was partially disrupted by the fact that only a few days after the completion of the Chapel it became a constant target of (un) known thieves, who, by stealing the construction material bit by bit, destroyed the structure. This process of deconstructing the built structure mirrored the current cultural climate among the local population.

The lack of basic value criteria and sense of the common good is obvious. These attributes are not necessarily related to material poverty. Local people saw this architectural intervention as a kind of implant inserted in their bodies when they hadn't been part of diagnosis of the surgery.



**Chapel for nature - construction site in the forest of the Monastery of St. Joachim Osogovski**  
*Photo credits: Bojan Karanakov*

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**Chapel for nature - construction site in the forest of the Monastery of St. Joachim Osogovski**  
*Photo credits: Bojan Karanakov*



# 10 CHAPTER NETWORK

by Tom Viaene

## Understanding Network Aalst's Territoriality

### Ways of Looking for a Place:

#### ON TERRITORIES AND THE TERRITORY OF 'AALST'

Looking at a place in terms of drawing lines or boundaries around it is a common way of trying to define it. When a place has clear administrative and political boundaries, it becomes even more tempting. If, as an outsider, you zoom in on a place called 'Aalst', these distinctions do not help the territory to become more visible. You can still discern the late medieval ramparts in the spatial structure of the current city and city information will present you with valuable numbers and the mandatory history. All this gives you a sense of territoriality in terms of 'space boundedness', but leaves you without a real sense of the place. In order to search for it, you have to imagine it "as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings, but where a larger proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region or even a continent." This in turn "allows a sense of place which is extroverted, which includes a consciousness of its links with the wider world, which integrates in a positive way the global and the local."<sup>1</sup>

It's simply not enough to put boundaries around something to demarcate it as a territory. Talking about territorial issues in terms of fixed boundaries, makes it easier to develop political strategies with a focus on 'stability' and 'prosperity'.

<sup>1</sup> Doreen Massey, "A Global Sense of Place", in: *From Space, Place and Gender*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994.





**Aerial photograph of Aalst, courtesy of city Aalst**

Territorial issues, stability and prosperity are explicitly linked, not only in international politics, but also in ‘home affairs’ (including city politics). But if a city is more the result of a politics of reterritorialisation, one needs to take into account the messiness of time, historical developments, heritage and local processes and actions. Some, for this reason, prefer to regard an urban area as a palimpsest. Certainly, Aalst is not a fixed entity, but a produced territory. Your sense of it comes when you have an idea of the impact on the fabric of social-political life by states, private corporations, community groups and individuals. A notion of the political technologies used to measure and control land and terrains is crucial.

### **SUPER DIVERSITY AALST**

Instead of saying that living beings exist in places, I agree<sup>2</sup> that places occur along the life paths of beings. A place is an unfolding of the entire meshwork of paths in which beings are entangled; so, along what paths do people appear here?

Thinking outside boundaries is both tempting and hard when it comes to the amorphous region of Flanders where Aalst is. Countryside and urban areas merge smoothly; there’s hardly a distinction to be made. Although countryside and urban areas might seem to flow into one another, there are clear administrative borders, in terms of urban agglomerates, cities and municipalities that control specified areas of public life. Despite these distinctions there is an overall shift in the understanding of territoriality these days: the changing boundaries of citizenship and the definition of political membership have become less clear in European immigration societies, cranking up the public debate about porous boundaries and the rights of others.

<sup>2</sup> I agree with anthropologist Tim Ingold. See his: Bindings against boundaries: entanglements of life in an open world, *Environment and Planning*, 2008, volume 40, pp. 1796-1810.

The Flemish city of Aalst is on the Dender river, at least on that part that runs through the province of East-Flanders. This municipality is full of 'energy tricks' (re-branding exercises) and the local government/administration seems full of confidence. Much housing has been renovated in the last couple of years. A lot of urban renewal projects are in the pipeline, especially in the northern part of the Dender and around the train station. Aalst isn't an exception in Flanders: like many other 'centrumsteden' (second-tier cities like Oostende, Kortrijk, Turnhout) it is a place in transition – often ignited by increasing Flemish subsidies (each of these cities has specific city contracts with the Flemish government) – and it attracts more and more (non-EU) newcomers (from Africa, the Middle East and non-EU countries in Eastern Europe). It is relatively good at monitoring integration policy and local care and education services are expanding to back this up.

Belgium's major transition is the rise of multilingual majority-minority cities and a growing 'diversity in the diversity'<sup>3</sup>, or what some describe as a transition to super diversity. The Flemish centrumsteden like Aalst have more and more people with a migration background (a quantitative transition) and are confronted with challenges and complexities arising from a growing diversity both between the groups and communities and within them (a qualitative transition). Migration patterns have changed so fast since the end of the 1990s and migrants' backgrounds are increasingly diverse – ethnically, linguistically, culturally, religiously and economically – so it is much harder to define who migrants are. This diversity in the diversity functions on different levels and through several generations. Certain dynamics make way for the growing diversification of these smaller cities like Aalst. Depending on asylum policy and local hospitality, more and more wealthy migrants flee the big cities. Gentrification of cities like Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent, adds to the growing influx of newcomers in cities like Aalst, Vilvoorde and Ronse.

The new situation these cities find themselves in – in which there isn't a majority ethnic group anymore – means that rethinking old ways of integrating newcomers is urgent. When more inhabitants come from a wide range of minorities, a more open and plural approach to the problem of integration is surely needed. When everyone, as a result, adapts to everyone, assimilation to one majority group or national identity becomes an outdated affair. Not only do we see a growing super diversity in terms of ethnic and cultural origin, but also a growing variety in life styles. The real differences are less to do with cultural backgrounds, than differences in financial circumstances, education, age. These differences now run through all ethnic and cultural groups. The challenges for super diverse societies lie in emancipation instead of assimilation: second or third generation migrants need to find ways to climb the social ladder. One would expect certain policy choices in the domains of education, work and accommodation to become more important than ever.<sup>4</sup>

Transnationalism and transmigration are important phenomena when considering the changing notion of belonging. The migrant is marked by a certain state of

<sup>3</sup> Dirk Geldof, "De transitie naar superdiversiteit. Van grootstedelijke naar Vlaamse realiteit", 22/07/2015, <http://ceder.cdenv.be/geldof-superdiversiteit>

<sup>4</sup> And this is where Flanders, according to Geldof, lacks the courage and the force: a structural neglect in the aforementioned domains settles in when it comes to people from a 'different' background. Benhabib clarified this as a more general contradiction of 'current political developments' in 2005: "The irony of current political developments is that while state sovereignty in economic, military, and technological domains has been greatly eroded, it is nonetheless vigorously asserted; national borders, while more porous, still keep out aliens and intruders. The old political structures may have waned but the new political forms of globalisation are not yet in sight. We are like travellers navigating an unknown terrain with the help of old maps, drawn at a different time and in response to different needs. While the terrain we are travelling on, the world-society of states, has changed, our normative map has not."

inbetweenness. She can be here and there at the same time. Through the internet and new communication technologies she can maintain networks of families and relevant others regardless of the place she physically inhabits. Apart from this, more migrants don't have the intention of really settling just here.



So people in super diverse societies have plural identities and an important part of one's identity is formed by the local community. Despite the constant movement inherent in transmigration, identifying with a city or municipality becomes

more important than with a nation-state or federal state. The emerging need for sub-national and supra-national spaces for democratic attachments and agency in the contemporary world is a direct result of the disaggregation of citizenship and the fact that state sovereignty is under increasing stress.<sup>5</sup>

Re-conceptualising urban citizenship is high on the agenda and in part an unkept promise.<sup>6</sup> To frame migration as a threat to the citizens of the city, understood as a community of, in this instance, Flemish descent and culture, is an old discourse. From a new perspective, "urban citizenship is disentangled from questions of national belonging and national citizenship, and instead derived from a description of the city as a place of globalisation, where the history, presence, and future of migration are simple facts. Such concepts speak for the people that are actually living in the city." Certain co-creative versions of participatory art forms are testing new ideas of citizenship.<sup>7</sup> But most of all, migrant communities and social movements are using this tension between new discourses and old strategies in their struggles for equity, as the right 'to the city movement' joins forces with migrant and refugee organisations.

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<sup>5</sup> See: S. Benhabib, "Borders, Boundaries, and Citizenship", *PS: Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Oct., 2005), pp. 673-677.

**Werfplein, Aalst, courtesy of Krysztuff Dorion**

<sup>6</sup> "The artists acted as agents in the process of enlarging the new public and expanding of public space in its political sense when they proposed to identify the processes behind urban transformation. Different theoretical models and everyday political events have highlighted the fact that what was once idealistically imagined as a homogeneous public is now clearly perceived as far from sharing common interests, and equal rights of access. Therefore, the question concerning the utopian nature of the public space becomes truly urgent." (Stefan Rusu), "Extending the potentiality of new public in politically and socially precarious environments", in: *On Curating, Issue 2 # 18/13: social curating and its public: curators from eastern europe report on their practices*, p.6) Also in architecture, some see, in an overall 'post-political' climate, a new wave of collectives with spatial manifestos coming to the fore, "What such spatial activists might hope to attain could become a sort of 'micropolitics', where small, local interventions are enacted with a hope to result in a kind of meta-intervention, which in turn might then hold potential to generate a cultural shift." (See: <http://archinect.com/features/article/149989510/spatial-activism-profiling-a-new-wave-of-european-architecture-collectives-and-their-spatial-manifestos>) As divided democracies emerge, in which there are few opportunities to participate in meaningful ways, eroding benefits and services, people become cynical and this spiral needs to be reversed with new and creative forms of engagement.

<sup>7</sup> Mathias Rodatz Interviewed by Hana Cisar in: "Questioning the Nation State: A Possible Future for Urban Citizenship", *On Curating*, issue 30, 2015. See also Hal Foster, *Bad New Days*, p. 123-124.

by Tom Viaene

On the Territory of the Institution

**NORMATIVE TURN**

Cultural institutions also mark or produce territories and have already incorporated the new awareness of territory as ‘articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings’.<sup>1</sup> Nowadays, no cultural institution can build a durable identity based on self-sufficient programming inside the fixed boundaries of its own territory. In its daily workings, external relationships and involvement with the immediate locality, an institution must also take on the idea of plasticity.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Doreen Massey’s work.

This changing role comes from a growing awareness of its embeddedness in the locality, and introduces cultural and moral responsibilities for the impact it has on territories it produces. Since the second part of the 1990s, new museology marked a change in the overall mission statement of museums worldwide. The slow process of integrating or including people who are different started much earlier, with the undermining of different forms of paternalism and display of colonial power. As soon as museums and cultural institutions started to see themselves self-critically as co-producers of territory, this created the conditions to produce an immigrant consciousness that could allow us to delink from Western hegemonic narratives.

The growing importance of inclusiveness in relation to new spaces of public participation manifested itself in extra-mural projects, including land art and performance art and the development of many good practices in community and participatory arts. Quality of life - enriching the intellectual life of the



community - and a social role became as important a mission as preserving or defending aesthetic quality. This normative turn, constituting social inclusion, full citizenship and empowerment came from recognition of diversity in our societies. By the end of the 1990s, museums saw the way to combat social exclusion culturally was to become inclusive organisations.

The critique of art institutions as neutral meaning-producing contexts was initiated by the interrogation of the boundaries of art within this context. During the 1970s, artists such as Hans Haacke, Michael Asher, and Mierle Laderman Ukeles created work that confronted the museum and gallery as exclusive spaces, as politically driven corporate entities, and as consumers of art-turned commodity. The sites that these projects addressed were not solely physical, but also institutional.



On an institutional level this led to a desire to eliminate all barriers to access in cultural participation. The more inclusive organisation's goal was not simply to create access and develop a particular audience but to combat the causes and symptoms of social exclusion. This deep engagement with the environment and often displaced communities came from two different strategies. Institutions acted as agents of social regeneration locally, or as vehicles of broader social change made an impact on the root causes or symptoms of exclusion.

**Werfplein Aalst with City Hall Aalst, courtesy of Krysztoff Dorion**

## **INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONS**

This social turn in the arts leaves us with a persistent challenge and many more good intentions. The challenge is to maintain the value and relevance of the city's traditional performance venues and nurture development of less traditional spaces. While the city's landmark arts centres play a key role in preserving cultural heritage, their visual exterior and strong connections to 19th-century ideology make them somewhat intimidating and unapproachable for certain sections of the community. In Brisbane, Australia, for instance they have found other ways to deal with this. Rather than dismissing such venues as antiquated and elitist, the city's cultural leaders help residents to engage with these spaces in innovative ways. Instead of presenting a product to an audience, such places are increasingly offering interactive cultural and artistic practice. Of course, what we often see is that centralised places for art, often with a burgeoning club scene and centres of contemporary arts, are doing no more than cultivating popular culture as an experience that people can negotiate and curate through their everyday lives. Such places connect a city's residents with art through curiosity towards inclusive cultural rituals rather than a celebration of exclusive cultural traditions.

It's easy to fall back on old ways of doing, or simply play into the hands of city marketing and the pressures of creative economic discourses. Consumption always lurks around the corner, hijacking any notion of participation. Whatever the ambiguities are, there is "a persisting tendency in at least part of the museum and heritage community to underestimate the importance of pre-planning and workforce development in order to build projects which are rooted in communities' needs, rather than driven by curatorial or institutional interests, or transitory political agendas. (...) In fact, (...) the difficulty still met by many museums to go beyond the traditional model of access development."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Simona Bodo, "Introduction to the pilot projects" in: *Museums as places for intercultural dialogue: selected practices from Europe*, Simona Bodo, Kirsten Gibbs, Margherita Sani (eds) 2009.

It takes more effort to act on an immigrant consciousness. It takes political choice, the choice of cultural inclusion. If institutions accept the definition of intercultural dialogue put forward over the last 20 years, a more sustainable process is needed, "a process (not a goal) actively engaging both indigenous individuals and those with an immigrant background, which is transformative on both sides, and in which all are equal participants; fostering reciprocity between the museum and its diverse audiences, by bringing into dialogue their different perspectives, experiences and knowledge bases"<sup>3</sup> This means genuinely engaging individuals as audiences and 'as creators, producers, distributors, commentators and decision makers', who take an active part in the institution's choices as well as in the negotiation and creation of meaning. For cultural institutions to become real spaces of negotiation, they must disown the homogenising and discriminating values that are still legitimising historic identity. Only then will people of different origins, backgrounds and attitudes have access to the knowledge embodied in objects and artefacts, to past, present and future narratives, and, eventually, to a collective meaning-making process.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

This sounds almost unauthorised, the stuff mission statements are made of. Certainly, many institutions are still groping in the dark. Most still develop strategies directed at consensus instead of the fierce debate that is needed. Ideally, cultural and educational institutions are in-between spaces that carry the burden of meaning; safe havens that allow for polarities, differences and conflicts to be recognised. Thus, any programming helps citizens learn to live with conflict, with the other and with difference by promoting attitudes that lead to the intersection of cultures and knowledge. What is needed is a reflection on new strategies for meaning-making and solutions best suited to safeguarding democratic rights in the framework of contemporary social and cultural tensions produced by globalisation.

For our meaning-maker to be anti-hegemonic, it would have to be "an active, historical agent that speaks in the name not of national pride or hegemony but of creative questioning and dissent. It suggests a spectator no longer focused on the auratic contemplation of individual works, but one who is aware of being presented with arguments and positions to read or contest."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Claire Bishop, *Radical Museology*, Köln: Walther König, 2014.

## SOCIAL CURATING

Social curating is the new talk in town. Pressure from neoliberal governments and city councils playing the mood music of austerity has stoked it up even more. Besides objecting to the new privatisations and exclusions, it addresses the question of the social relations which could construct any new and better notion of public space. And to be unsettling or provocative enough, projects need to effect 'a sense of the wrong place'<sup>5</sup>, i.e. by shifting the status quo, by intervening in the bordered, prescribed spaces of location and consequently these dislocations have to be meaningful beyond the specifics of the location in which the project was developed. What is crucial for most agonistic co-creative projects is the relentless effort to subvert "the intractable inaccessibility of the economic and social for most ordinary people: we need a way of being able to participate in the public sphere without the normal entrance requirements. We need an alternative way of understanding public participation through the cultural."<sup>6</sup>

The aim of re-articulating and reframing curatorial epistemologies over the last five years had everything to do with an almost Socratic re-evaluation of failure, not-understanding or not-knowing. What happens when curatorial authorship is challenged and the role of the participant becomes a priority in the process? Some have spoken in this regard about 'slow curating'<sup>7</sup>, because an attitude of opening up implies a modesty by which all those involved take their time to listen to others. Apart from that, instead of adhering 'to a watered-down curatorial premise or an intentionally populist mediation', the curatorial poses activating possibilities where audiences may learn something now or later, may learn much or little, or may be moved to love or hate. It creates a site of the 'not-knowing', a place where we are able to jointly open up a common space in which the not-knowing becomes most important; a 'wrong place', where we bump into problems for which the answers are not given. In this curatorial-educational encounter expertise turns into a contested space where curator and the audience/community engage in a reciprocal relationship of mutual respect and admiration for what is brought to the table in relation to the artwork or project.

In reality projects sometimes do not match good intentions. Some difficulties can just show up. Therefore besides opening up and taking time to listen, other forms of trust building are crucial when becoming an inclusive institution. It's a thin line sometimes. When involving a viewer, participant or community becomes an end, not a means, probably not enough attention is given to the quality of subjectivity and sociality. Participatory projects should improve self-esteem, self-consciousness and sense of citizenship, regardless whether the project is based on contribution, collaboration or co-creation.<sup>8</sup>

Another difficulty arises when within the arts; community-based development seems to revolve around the short-term presence of professional artists in communities, rather than the broad-based development of artistic skills by members of those communities. Although there are artists based in the com-

<sup>5</sup> This rephrases the way Doreen Massey was quoted in Claire Doherty, "Curating Wrong Places...Or Where Have All the Penguins Gone", in: Paul O'Neill, ed., *Curating x 24*. Amsterdam: De Appel, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Vickery, "Strange Cargo. The future of cultural participation", [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/theatre\\_s/cp/staff/vickery/research/vickery\\_strange\\_cargo.pdf](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/theatre_s/cp/staff/vickery/research/vickery_strange_cargo.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Megan Johnston, "Slow Curating After the turn: art education beyond the museum", *On Curating*, 31, Issue 24 / December 2014. Interestingly, Johnston bases her defense for slow curatorial thinking on a well-known sociologist of art and dance in Belgium, Rudi Laermans' reflections on the educational turn: See his: "Teaching Theory and the Art of Not-Knowing: Notes on Pedagogical Commonalism," *Krisis: Journal for Contemporary Philosophy*, Issue 1, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> See Nina Simon's classification in *The Participatory Museum*, <http://www.participatorymuseum.org/read/>. Co-creative projects progress very similarly to collaborative projects, but they confer more power to participants.

munity, they may not be engaged with it. Artists may also use an artistic language the audience cannot understand. This may be due to a lack of policy and funding support for the artist and the project.

In a desire for social betterment the artist or collective should not be a social worker. An artist working with an institution is a poor substitute for a social worker. To confuse the roles devalues both. It is dangerous to suggest one could do the other and indeed can lead to a situation where the artist is the state's cheaper option to proper and appropriate social work. A well-balanced provocative participatory practice or an agonistic approach can pose deep and probing questions. The social worker will be wholly committed to social betterment.<sup>9</sup>

A participatory project need not be a difficulty or disadvantage and might serve to legitimise a museum's position in society by realising more socially relevant and accurate exhibitions. But such self-othering might also easily pass into self-absorption, "in which the project of "ethnographic self-fashioning" becomes the practice of philosophical narcissism."<sup>10</sup> Notably, collaborative museum projects with indigenous people can be used for museums' self-promotion and some have suggested that individuals and organisations align themselves with the disadvantaged to feel better about themselves and their own privileged social position. Collaborative exhibits are sometimes a form of symbolic restitution.



**Graanmarkt Aalst, courtesy of Krysztoff Dorion**

<sup>9</sup> This artist-researcher wrote a PhD on these matters and tackles the question quite well. He also presents us with a good taxonomy of participatory arts: <https://conflictsocialconflict.wordpress.com/2013/11/28/the-artist-as-social-worker-vs-the-artist-as-social-wanker/>

<sup>10</sup> Foster, Hal, "The Artist as Ethnographer" *The Return of the Real*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1996, p. 7



# 12 CHAPTER NETWORK

by Tom Viaene

## The Territory of Network Aalst: The Case of the Babelonië Project

### NETWORK/BABELONIË/ATHAR JABER

Network Aalst tries to deal with the new social make-up of our societies and re-configuration of the arts within them. When being in diaspora becomes a generalised state of being and even more people are displaced, successful work in the cultural sphere will have more to do with improving dialogue between different communities living on the same territory than with financial results.<sup>1</sup> Everything – exhibition-making, in-situ projects, co-creation works, community arts – will have to start from collaborations, locally and internationally, within the arts sector and with others. Art centres must become more aware of the consequences of changes in authority politics to formulate a future for themselves.

Network's programme over the last couple of years has questioned the role and position of art in society. It has produced exhibitions with a socio-political dimension and adopted a co-curated approach to the activities that were part of Understanding Territoriality, with its partners. It has been investing in the development of new audiences in Aalst, where a socially marginalised demographic is growing. Until now, Network has mostly worked with artists making work about displaced communities primarily for a non-displaced audience. Lately it has started to collaborate with local organisations with expertise in community building, marginalised communities and the social inclusion of non-EU migrants. One of these partnerships was Network's involvement in an integration project in Aalst called Babelonië.

<sup>1</sup> See also Edward Said's Reflections on Exile and Other Essays, 2000.

At Babelonië, Dutch speaking people and newcomers meet to practice language skills and build up a social network. These gatherings are organised in little groups and talks are focused around daily matters. In the first half of 2016, Sim Cha Chi led the first six workshops sessions, the second six were led by artist Athar Jaber.



**Workshop with Athar Jaber, Aalst, 2016, courtesy zof Netwerk**

Athar was invited to join people in the district house every two weeks on a Thursday afternoon to sit with them and take over the round tables by presenting himself as a working artist and influencing the agenda of the talks according to his art practice. I was also invited to join the newly formed community of Babelonië. Netwerk's role was to mediate between this artist, Vormingplus<sup>2</sup> as local co-organiser and the overall course of Babelonië.

<sup>2</sup> Vormingplus run centres across Flanders and Brussels that organise a range of activities that give adults personal, social and cultural competencies and stimulate participation in society (<http://www.vormingplus.be>)

A group of individuals, speaking different languages and from diverse backgrounds, came together for at least two hours every two weeks. During the six sessions of workshops presided over by Athar, a total of 69 people attended – of which 41 were newcomers and 28 Belgian. Through subjects that were of great personal and artistic concern to Athar, exchanges were set up about culture, art experience, identity and territory. What influence does artistic expression have on the participants' identity? How do people and art relate to territoriality? What is the role of art in times of uncertainty, crisis and war?

Difficult questions surfaced gradually and were raised only after people talked about more casual stuff. Their first encounter was a gathering at the art centre itself. The group was presented to Athar; for some of them it was the first time they set foot in Netwerk, or any centre of contemporary art for that matter. The group was guided through the current exhibition – called Surprise – and then discussed what they had seen and experienced.



**Workshop with Sim Cha Chi, Aalst, 2016, courtesy of Netwerk**

In the second encounter Athar had prepared a small presentation on his artistic practice. He gave insight into his own intricate cultural background, the paths he had crossed before arriving with his parents in the Low Countries, the physical labour of sculpting, the materials he used, the themes of violence and war in the disembodied sculptures and the role of memories in art. The atmosphere at that point was quite engaging with the artist-as-mediator conveying a sense of generosity instead of prizing his own achievements. It opened up the floor to all kinds of open questions – out of sheer curiosity – concerning the works that, being projected, passed before our eyes.

It's only now, that I see a connection between Athar's disfigured bodies and the curatorial attempts to disable the museum.<sup>3</sup> A slow unprejudiced scan of the subject unravels itself as the group experiments with different words and thoughts to give meaning to what they see, as if their hands are mentally following the contours of the figures Athar talks about. The conversation is not directed in any predetermined course. People speak freely, with soft intonations. Conventional art places and history often do not account for physically disabled subjects (sculptures) or open negotiation. Without knowing in advance, Athar basically included everyone in a flexible platform-building practice, where the specifics of place didn't matter (though they do!) and we-as-listeners wielded more agency than anything else.

The third encounter was about the election of American President Donald Trump. In hindsight this was a revealing session in more than one sense. There was only a small number of participants on that day, but talking about the meaning of political authority today is nevertheless crucial. What does authority mean when that authority undermines any sense of truth? This election means different things to different people, depending on their different countries of birth. Syria is on our minds, most of the time. Also here, the group collectively, and only tentatively, explored a new geopolitical landscape.

The most difficult session was the one on the vocabulary of art. For some of the participants this was the first time ever they had reflected on these matters. What is a museum or a gallery? What is art after all? Can art convey political messages? For something to be art should it be beautiful? Only when people talked about what art meant in their different countries of origin did the conversation run more smoothly. In an attempt to talk about the way the West had stolen art works from the countries they invaded or colonised, the group again tackled power structures and the hegemonic discourses that surround these issues. Indirectly again, the topics that also haunt curatorial practices become the subject of this new space of negotiation.

The last two workshops appeared to be the most revealing ones. The fifth encounter focused on identity, belonging, the language you dream in, and musical and other preferences. In the last session, a creative session in dialogue with Athar's practice was set up in Netwerk. The group of 10 took part in a workshop in moulding your own hands. Athar made the group for this occasion part of his larger project on throwing hands which is intricately connected to the city of Antwerp (from where the name is derived) and its relationship to the colonial history of Congo. He gave them the choice of taking the results back home or donating it to his project, which most of them did. The donation of their own hands couldn't have been a more appropriate generous exchange to end this series of encounters.



**Workshop with Sim Cha Chi, Aalst, 2016, courtesy of Netwerk**

**3** I refer here to Amanda Cachia's curatorial practice, outlined in her wonderful article: "Disabling' the museum: Curator as infrastructural activist", *Journal of Visual Art Practice*, 12 (3) pp. 257–289. She situates the practices of artists with disabilities as a critical player within art history and contemporary art practice, and addresses how their works resonate with the complex embodiment of disabled corporeality. For her more general practice she appears to be inspired by Terry Smith's conception of today's curator 'as an infrastructural activist', e.g. curators as "process shapers" and "programme builders" must simultaneously move between the resources that an institution offers, and yet also find freedom in public spaces and places, the virtual domain and other institutional infrastructures not typically associated with art. The set-up of Babelonië not only feeds into this, but this conception gets another meaning through the less-conventional setting of Babelonië.

Everything starts with the possibility of the encounter. Babbelonië wasn't conflict-ridden or anything thought provoking. Relations weren't overthrown. But in its modesty, it took that necessary step into different communities, which normally fall outside the normal audience of the art centre.

### QUESTION MARK

Netwerk Aalst, is not confined or bounded to a territory, but extends as it grows along the multiple paths of its entanglement in the textured world, to paraphrase Tim Ingold. In that path-crossing, strangers become co-labourers, making kin and expressing collectively what we consider important in culture. In the global village where the range of our experience has grown exponentially, we have not automatically become global citizens or digital nomads, but we have become neighbours. Babbelonië offered a space to reflect and debate our value; a step forward, because of that reflection.

I see a centre arising, which is not even a centre anymore. It doesn't stick to its own forms of knowledge and ways of presentation anymore. It does many things at the same time, because the meaning-giving-cum-making happens in a collective spirit. It has many functions because a city like Aalst faces many challenges at the same time (comparable to other second-tier cities). A multi-purpose art centre – and every place needs one – could provide arts education programming for everybody, showcase community projects, host contemporary art exhibitions that reflect the neighborhood, and more.

So, because governmental authorities are giving it up: the arts take on the role of marking and articulating collective identity, of challenging common perceptions, affirming cultures and raising their profile with wider audiences. In this way they deal with the fact that multicultural policy has left many of the second-generation marginalised and disconnected.



All of the above encounters, and especially the creative last one, are proof of what researchers have laid bare, “that the creative process is a key site of value for audiences for the contemporary arts: having contact with the creative process is often a crucial part of how people come to develop an interest in and enjoyment of the contemporary arts.”<sup>4</sup> It sounds simple, but it demands a creative approach to specific places, which means reflecting on the lost or missing forms of community discourse – roles and positions, conviviality, camaraderie, group empowerment. Critical artists aim to inhabit the disenfranchised place of those without a cultural language through imaginative projection and develop processes that are attractive, then absorbing, inspiring a commitment. This commitment to developing self-expression and dialogue with others undergoing the same process is a political commitment.

**Workshop with Athar Jaber, Aalst, 2016, courtesy of Netwerk**

Maybe it still is that the centre – because it is a kind of forerunner in “re-thinking the role of cultural participation in context of hopelessness”<sup>4</sup> – is an organiser of encounters in which it becomes possible to see that other options are still possible; in which the participants come to see the role they have in determining the nature of the environment they live in.

As a contemporary ideology, hopelessness is “where the choices offered to ordinary people are the participation in the building of economic capital, then social capital proportionate to that attainment, then the acquisition of cultural capital as a symbolic mediation of capital achievements”<sup>5</sup>. What are needed are strategies to subvert the intractable inaccessibility of economic and social capital for most ordinary people: we need a way of being able to participate in the public sphere without the normal entrance requirements. We need an alternative way of understanding public participation through the cultural. That’s why good participatory practices are place-based, involve everyone and are concerned with the fate of localities, towns, regions, and the deep meaning of social existence.

If cultural institutions currently have to strike a balance between asserting their authorial voices and strategies of production, their relevance in super diverse societies and their responsibility for doing more with fewer resources, none of these overlapping concerns should be neglected; after all, institutions co-produce territories for artists through activating possibilities for different groups of citizens. And so we end on a different note. What resources do artists have to develop other ways of looking for a place, not hijacked by economic or political values – a place where what is left of community outsteps our wildest expectations. Question mark.

<sup>4</sup> Gross, Jonathan & Stephanie Pitts, “Audiences for the contemporary arts: Exploring varieties of participation across art forms in Birmingham, UK”, *Participations. Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, Vol.13, Issue 1, May 2016.

<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Vickery, “Strange Cargo. The future of cultural participation”, [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/theatre\\_s/cp/staff/vickery/research/vickery\\_strange\\_cargo.pdf](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/theatre_s/cp/staff/vickery/research/vickery_strange_cargo.pdf)



# 13 CHAPTER NETWORK

by **Philip Metten**  
in conversation with  
**Wouter Davidts**

## From Sculpture to Platform

In the following interview the art critic  
Wouter Davidts speaks with the visual artist

Philip Metten about the aspect of 'territoriality' in his oeuvre. Metten's rather broad conception of sculpture implies intersections with architectural design, whereby the functional dimension of a piece of sculpture is a foremost concern. Throughout the evolution of Metten's work, a variety of terrains have been explored, tested and seized.

And still the artist tries to open up these 'occupied' areas and to create a tension between the artwork and the context, as well as between the design and its territory.

WD: The notion of 'territory' can be understood in two ways. On the one hand, a territory acts as your area of play, where you work, live, and where you set out your boundaries. So I mean this in a literal sense, just as countries or nations delimit their area. On the other hand, a territory can be understood on the level of research, or as a concept. Which theoretical framework is important to you? What is the conceptual domain in which you work?

PM: My true territory, in the first place, is sculpture. That is the medium in which I am able to express myself the best. But I still have a very broad conception of 'sculpture'. I experimented with this in the past. Initially, I would open up the autonomous sculptures I made, which tended to turn them into spaces. At a later stage they became real 'places', whereby I'd see a sculpture as a kind of platform, as a space other people could be invited into. Contrary to the autonomy of classical sculpture, which does generate more distant behaviours

of viewing, I have come to see sculpture as a place you can visit, a space of which you become a part.

WD: Now you are already pointing out a third level of territory, namely, the possibility to create inside a sculpture as such an area that you, as an artist, can control and delimit, and which the visitor can subsequently step into.

PM: What's more, this delimited sculpture usually finds itself within another territory, namely, in an existing building or any other given context.

WD: We are speaking of four levels then: the meta-level, the concrete place of work, the definition of sculpture as territory, and the fourth, the domain a sculpture occupies in an existing material context. But let us for a moment return to sculpture and the historical category of sculpture as an art form.

As an artist you enter into this realm and set to work within it. But how do you do that? How does a young artist enter the historical landscape of sculpture?

PM: My interest in sculpture evolved out of a fascination for archaeology. In the beginning I modelled copies of sculptures from antiquity – which I only knew from reproductions – albeit in my own style. But, after having made countless sculptures in my studio, I wanted to escape this solitary activity. I felt the need to communicate with other people. I wanted, in other words, to expand my territory. Both within and outside of sculpture. So in 2006, I made the sculpture 'Noise of Quasar,' a work that consisted of two floors, for the s.m.a.k. (Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art, Ghent). I then invited musicians to perform on the top floor of the work. The sculpture was thereby activated, not only by the performers, but also by the members of the audience.

WD: How does this distinct approach to sculpture relate to the strategic desire to conquer a place of one's own in the annals of art history?

PM: The niche within sculpture and perhaps even in art history in which I apparently seem to have ended up, is a consequence of the things I do. I didn't however plan it out in advance. The position in which I find myself is rather the result of a convergence of circumstances and coincidences.

WD: I asked you this because these kinds of considerations as an artist, whether they are strategic or not, always say something about the way in which an



BAR, Antwerp, 2013,  
by Philip Metten, courtesy  
of Jan Kempnaers

artist works. There are countless artists who, armed with a certain historical baggage and knowledge, determine for themselves that ‘this is where I am going to establish myself’ and ‘this is where I will build up something that will become my territory.’

PM: Do you mean based on examples from history?

WD: Yes.

PM: Gordon Matta-Clark certainly is an artist whom I feel a strong affinity with, especially in the work I am making now. That’s because the sculptures I am making these days take on infrastructural proportions, which only exist by grace of existing buildings. But that also goes for sculptors such as Walter Pichler (who incidentally studied architecture, just like Matta-Clark) or Eduardo Paolozzi. I am also interested in architects like Adolf Loos, Hans Hollein, or Japanese figures such as Shin Takamatsu or Arata Isozaki. And finally, I am very much fascinated by someone like Frederick J. Kiesler, because he connects the two worlds in a marvellous way. But it’s not as if I determine very consciously which position I want to take up. Also, my work is in continual evolution, which means it can continue progressing in any number of directions. The urge for making new work and seeking change or renewal within the work itself is what motivates me as an artist.



BAR, Antwerp, 2013,  
by Philip Metten, courtesy  
of Jan Kempenaers

WD: The idea of having a territory of one’s own within the art world nevertheless has something very possessive about it. The idea of territory always comes with notions of ‘possession’, ‘occupation’, ‘delimitation’ or ‘protection’. But in your case that doesn’t seem relevant in the least. Can you tell me how the logic of your work unfolds?

PM: I want to create something that can be shared. The sculptures I make are usually places people can be invited into. They are actually very social places! They are open platforms on which things occur that I do not control myself, let alone that I would want to. For a sculpture like BAR the only control I exerted was over the initial design. Once the sculpture was there, the work was subject to adaptations and changes by the owner and the visitors. But that is precisely what fascinates me so much about this. In that sense, the social dimension of the sculpture could well be my greatest motivation. It is of fundamental importance that the work is activated by other people. Together with the negotiations with the owner and possibly with other instances involved in the



creation process, these are matters that are inherent to the whole concept.

WD: To what degree do you experience a work such as BAR as truly your terrain?

PM: As it becomes a public place, it is no longer my terrain. It becomes part of the public domain.

WD: So you see it as a participative work, whereby other people continually redefine the boundaries of the area that has been granted to you?

PM: No, no, I don't like that at all. It is my territory at the moment that I am working on the scale model in my studio. That is where I determine the interventions, the form, the materials, the heights, the orientation, and so forth. I only let go of the work after the design phase.

WD: How do you then see the confrontation with, or the relationship between, a very determined place and your own work? In BAR you completely transformed an existing place, whereas in Extra City or in the New York gallery Kai Matsumiya you were obliged to work within the logic of the specific architecture of those respective places.

PM: First, you always have to feel out the situation you are being invited into. During my preparatory research I look into the meaning of such a place. What can I add? What can my work signify there? For Kai Matsumiya I wanted to



make one large sculpture in the form of a wall relief. During the phase of conception, I pushed the sculpture, which I had initially foreseen inside of the gallery, forwards, so that it would come to be positioned between the gallery and the street. The sculpture acted as a hinge between the public space and the

semi-private domain, lingering between the art world and the world outside. Through this shift the sculpture suddenly attained the status of architecture. For me it is however still a singular work that I showed in the gallery: I left the gallery completely empty otherwise, so the sculpture could manifest itself as



**The Corner Show, Extra City, Antwerp, 2015, by Philip Metten, courtesy of Jan Kempnaers**

**ESSEN, installation view, Netwerk Aalst, 2016, by Philip Metten, courtesy of Jan Kempnaers and Netwerk Aalst**

the only art work present, and by no means as a mere façade.

WD: The determination of the placement of a sculpture seems to be very important to you. Contrary to classical sculpture, which assumes an autonomous status, stands up straight and self-consciously marks out a certain point in space, your approach to sculptural occupation seems to be completely different. The sculpture for Kai Matsumiya (as quasi-façade architecture) and your sculptural intervention in The Corner Show (as scenography) are completely different ways of occupying an area. Could you formulate what the difference is in terms of both spatial determination and delimitation for these respective works?

PM: The sculptures each time materialise an answer to very specific conditions.



153 Stanton, Kai Matsumiya, New York, 2015, by Philip Metten, courtesy of Jan Kempnaers

Every situation forces me to apply a focused strategy. The surroundings, the street, and the people related to the location where the work will be implemented, determine the final form. In Stanton Street (NY) I wanted to connect the gallery to the urban bustle outside, whereas Extra City is located in a far quieter street. Where the New York neighbourhood demanded an extrovert piece of work, in Berchem, Antwerp, a more introvert work was called for.

WD: Regardless of your intentions, I have often witnessed your own surprise at the work when it is being produced. How does the aspect of 'control' relate to the design and production phases?

PM: I am always very much surprised to see my work when it is finished. In my studio I always work with a scale model. At that moment I control everything, to the tiniest detail. But once it is produced, there are so many aspects I no longer have in my hands. But that is precisely what fascinates me. I don't have to reign over it. My intrinsic motivation is still to experiment with the possibilities of the medium of 'sculpture'. Can a sculpture work like scenography, or like a restaurant? What impact does sculpture exert on a specific location? Those are interesting questions. At Netwerk Aalst I investigated to what extent the design for the interior of a restaurant could initially operate

as a sculpture. In the exhibition space I installed an elementary version of the envelope that is being slid into the front space of the restaurant ESSEN in Borgerhout, Antwerp. What I was showing at Netwerk therefore wasn't a scale model, but a concrete building component of a future restaurant.

WD: One of the best effects of The Corner Show was that, despite the scale of your work, no other artist felt threatened by it or criticised it. It laid bare the generosity of architecture, but it also demonstrated the possibility for sculpture and functionality to coincide, to make way for others, whilst occupying a firm position oneself, evoked a contradiction by which I was dumbfounded.



The Corner Show, Extra City, Antwerp, 2015, by Philip Metten, courtesy of Jan Kempnaers

PM: That is precisely what I wanted to achieve with this work: to offer a generosity with regards to the existing architecture, as well as the curators, the artists and the visitors. But at the same time the volumes had to be a certain size in order to be able to occupy territory at all within that merciless architecture of Extra City. I also think that the other artworks strengthened the volumes' visibility. And still, I mainly aimed to devise a good balance between openness and intimacy by putting the mobile volumes in different corners and positions.

WD: Just to close, I would like to enquire after your own territory. To Gordon Matta-Clark, Soho in New York served as an important reference. It was his home territory, his work terrain and community, all in one. You yourself studied in Antwerp and by now have been living there for twenty years. What influence does your daily territory have on your work?

PM: The influence on my work is certainly there, but it is not visible. I am fascinated by the Turnhoutsebaan, a street in Borgerhout close to where I live. I sometimes dream of transforming a night shop there. But a territory only has an influence on the work from the moment that something will be built there.

**TRANSCRIPTION AND FIRST EDIT: Charlotte Van Buylaere**  
**TRANSLATION FROM DUTCH TO ENGLISH: Kate Mayne**

Philip Metten is a visual artist, living and working in Antwerp, Belgium. For the past few years he has made large-scale sculptural installations that explicitly engage in a dialogue with architecture. He has had solo shows at Kai Matumiya New York (2015), Autocenter Berlin (2011), z33 Hasselt (2010) and at s.M.A.K Ghent (2006). He developed the exhibition architecture for 'The Corner Show' at Extra City Antwerp and participated in numerous group shows such as in De Appel Amsterdam, Muzee Ostend and Centro Cultural De Sao Paulo. Since 2010 he has been Guest Professor at the School of Arts Ghent (kask).

Wouter Davidts teaches at the Department of Architecture & Urban Planning and the Department of Art, Music and Theatre Sciences of Ghent University (UGent). He has published widely on the museum, contemporary art and architecture and is the author of *Bouwen voor de kunst?* (2006) and *Triple Bond* (2017). He is the editor of such volumes as *The Fall of the Studio* (2009) and *Luc Deleu – T.O.P. office: Urban Space* (2012; with Stefaan Vervoort and Guy Châtel). He was the curator of *The Corner Show* (2015, Extra City Antwerp; with Mihnea Mircan and Philip Metten).  
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Fabrica

by Lorenza Ippolito

# Territorialities Between the UK and Italy

## From Brighton to Biella and Back: Place, Meaning and Identity

I had the opportunity to take part in two residencies during 2015 and 2016, the first in November 2015 at Cittadellarte, Fondazione Pistoletto in Biella, Italy, and the second in July and August 2016 at Fabrica in Brighton & Hove, UK. Cittadellarte has sought to achieve responsible social change by integrating artists with local projects, organisations and businesses since the 1990s, which is similar to the work Fabrica does to keep Brighton communities connected through art. Both residencies had a common thread relating to questions on place and the way we think of ourselves in relation to place in a globalised, transient world. I am an Italian, queer migrant - born in South Africa to Italian parents. I returned to Italy between the ages of 11 and 25, and I have lived in the UK for 11 years now. I am also an artist working on ideas of belonging and fluid identities and how these play out locally and globally and affect notions of 'self' in contemporary culture. I am excited by the chance to reflect on my relationship to the place I live in and the place I am from, to look at how my connections between place and culture have changed, perhaps diluted or stretched, in a world constantly in motion.



**CITTADELLARTE - FONDAZIONE PISTOLETTO,  
BIELLA, ITALY**

In 2015 I was invited for a one-week residency, *Creating Territorialities*, at Cittadellarte – Fondazione Pistoletto in Biella, Italy. Although I am originally from Italy it was a place I had never experienced and didn't know. Nevertheless, I was amused by the initial, uncanny feeling during my trip from the airport to Biella. I was at the same time immersed in and detached from familiar impressions – the language, transport system, announcements on public transport, the landscape, social interactions I observed, the light, infrastructure and buildings. All this was familiar, but also slightly different, slightly odd. The language was spoken with a different intonation and dialect; the trains were a different colour and the names of cities and towns in the announcements felt made up and dissonant. On my train journey to Cittadellarte, the landscape reminded me of Bologna, but the typical flatness of the Pianura Padana was even flatter and more extended here in its north-western corner – a larger surface in the dimming fog. When the mountains came rushing towards me, they were different too, taller, at times jagged and sharp, others a rolling mass that felt eternal. I arrived at the station in Biella and, waiting for a not-so-legal taxi, I looked out at the town, or where I thought the town would probably be (straight ahead of me just like it was coming out of Bologna's station), I started to think about my relationship with Italy. I thought about how my idea of Italy was determined and formed through my experiences of Bologna and Southern Pianura Padana and by my time growing up in South Africa, but also by my experience of it as a middle class, white, Italian woman and, now, by my time as a migrant in Brighton. This place was something new and different; to some extent, it was a blank canvas for me.

During my week in Biella the territory was mapped out for me and that blank canvas became a site of critical interaction. I learnt about the ways in which Biella was defined and marked by people with power, people with less power and how the church and state had a good go at it, too. I was struck by the emphasis on history. Our hosts would venture deep into medieval history for explanations and justifications of certain customs and their relation to the land. One day we visited Trappa, a



**Every Apple Tells a Story, discussion event for Ecologies of Place Residency, August 2016 at Fabrica with speaker Peter May, Co-founder of the National Collection of Sussex Apples, Brighton Permaculture Trust. Image ©Francesca Moore**



**All About Apples Artist's Walk at Stamner Park, National Collection of Sussex Apples with Peter Mat for Ecologies of Place Residency, August 2016. Image ©Francesca Moore**



**Sustenance Dinner part of Ecologies of Place Residency August 2016. Local businesses, artist and cultural organisations came together to discuss how can artists and sustainable businesses work together to create places of enduring value? Image by ©Francesca Moore**



monastery in the mountains with a peculiar history. It was built by a rich, pious man who wanted it there against the will of the church, his family and the local people. He eventually failed. I also visited Ricetto di Candelo, a medieval fortified food storage structure where the families who owned a plot still carry on communal sharing practices dating back to medieval times. The tensions played out on a territory between inhabitants continue in new ways. Migrants now coming to Biella looking for a way into Europe are reworking the territory. Some have stayed, opening up Biella to other places and cultures, but also creating new tensions.



*Sustenance Dinner part of Ecologies of Place Residency, August 2016. Artist CiCi Blumstein, delivers an exhilarating talk about the consequences of alienating communities from the process of creating what they consume. Image by ©FrancescaMoore*

### **THE THIRD PARADISE, FABRICA, BRIGHTON, UK**

In 2016 I started working on Ecologies of Place an artist residency working alongside Fabrica's summer show, The Third Paradise by Michelangelo Pistoletto. The Third Paradise is a larger project that seeks to reconcile the conflict between the first paradise of nature and the second, of human artifice.

This conflict has led to great imbalances between human activity and the respect for the planet, and by imagining a third paradise representing a socially responsible path to a new planetary civilisation, Pistoletto aims for a resolution that will save the planet and humanity.

As a queer artist, I find problematic the persistence in Italian culture of a male figurehead as the leading light of a "new" planetary civilisation. I am also concerned by how gender roles in the art world are unquestioned. Nevertheless, I was interested to see how Pistoletto's notion of a more sustainable future could grow in Brighton, the place I had chosen as my home. The experience at Cittadellarte informed my choices during Ecologies of Place. Having had the possibility to reflect on how people from a different context bring new ideas and ways of seeing into a place and transform it, I was also aware of the power entities such as the church, the state or business had to shape a place. Ecologies of Place was an opportunity to talk about sustainability and start a conversation in the city concentrating on different aspects of Brighton's reality, investigating individual and community initiatives, sustainable businesses and organisations in Brighton. My final aim was to understand what gives a place enduring value. With this in mind I brought together initiatives working to fill gaps in social provision, energy efficiency, self-sufficiency, biodiversity and heritage conservation, with a long-sighted view to the future. I wanted to underline



*Lamb Tales Artist's Walk part of Ecologies of Place Residency, July 2016. Brighton & Hove Council's Looker volunteer, Jane Hawkins, guides the group to Whitehawk Camp, an archaeological site on the South Downs, where sheep help maintain the natural habitat. Image by Lorenza Ippolito.*

through dialogue and open conversations the need to look after each other, the environment and the city's sustainability in a deeper and fuller way. The response was overwhelming, not only from organisations and the grassroots, but I felt businesses had a real desire to contribute to the conversation in more practical ways.

It has been an interesting journey from Brighton to Italy and back. It has been a time of reflection on my 11 years in the UK and how my relationship to the places I inhabit are constantly reshaped and reworked. But also how the places we all inhabit are constantly in motion, with people and objects moving across boundaries bringing with them cultures, ideas and changes, which are difficult to predict.



**Self-organised participatory workshop in Cittadellarte (Biella, Italy) by resident artists, November 2015. Creating Territorialities one-week residency. Image by Lorenza Ippolito.**



**Self-organised participatory workshop in Cittadellarte (Biella, Italy) by resident artists, November 2015. Detail of the mind map collectively created by resident artists. Image by Lorenza Ippolito.**



**Self-organised participatory workshop in Cittadellarte (Biella, Italy) by resident artists, November 2015. Image by Lorenza Ippolito.**

Lorenza Ippolito is a visual artist working with still and moving image to create participatory art works, within diverse communities, that focus on themes of identity, belonging and the everyday. She engages with and explores the idea of public conversation through bringing together the artist and the audience in the same temporal and geographical space. Ippolito is currently engaged on a PhD research project entitled *Inventing Kinship: A transcultural exploration of queer kinship in India* with the aim of working collaboratively across cultures to explore non-normative relationships and networks.

<http://www.lorenzaippolito.co.uk/>

Francesca Moore is a freelance photographer whose personal work stems from interests in people and the environment. With an MSc in Biological Photography and Imaging, Francesca draws on her scientific background to portray humanitarian, social and environmental issues.

<http://www.francescamoore.co.uk/>

# 15 CHAPTER

FABRICA

by **Liz Whitehead,**  
**Ted Polhemus,**  
**Juliette Buss**  
**& Lindsey Smith**

## **Kicking Over the Statues**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This chapter contains two texts arising from Fabrica's Autumn 2016 exhibition *Kick over the statues* by photographer and documentary filmmaker Ewen Spencer. *Street Cred* an essay by Ted Polhemus describes the rise of streetstyle fashion from the late 1940's to the present day. *Relinquishing Control* is a reflection on *State of Control*, a gallery take-over event at Fabrica during October 2016. It is written by Liz Whitehead (Director, Fabrica), Juliette Buss (Learning and Participation Curator, Photoworks) and Lindsey Smith (Artist and freelance Artist Educator specialising in photography and moving image).  
<http://ewenspencer.com/>

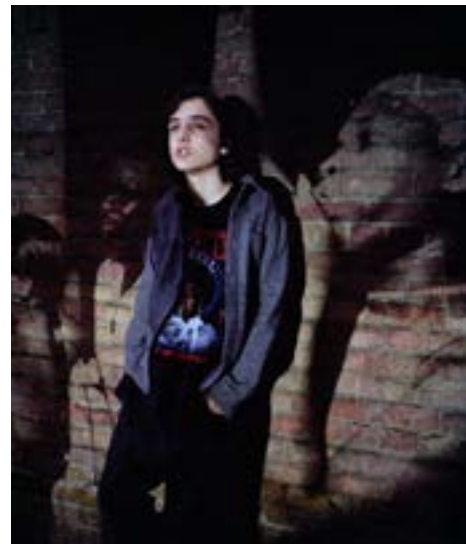
*Kick over the statues* addressed the themes of Understanding Territoriality in several ways:

### **CONTEXT AND CURATORIAL DEVELOPMENT**

The starting point for the exhibition was to explore power and boundaries within the theme of Understanding Territoriality. Fabrica was particularly interested in engaging with youth culture and understanding more about the confidence and agency of young people; how and where young people feel powerful and how this power is communicated in the civic space. Photographer Ewen Spen-

cer was identified as an artist who could respond in an interesting way to this theme because of his long-term preoccupation with UK youth style and subculture.

Spencer has been documenting British adolescents since 2000, capturing young people in clubs, raves and out on the streets as they come to terms with socialising, dating and sex. What separates him from other social documentarians is a sense that he knows and likes his subjects, that they trust him enough to allow him into their world, and that he has an understanding of what's going on without being embedded in the scene himself. He built his professional reputation early through youth style magazines, such as Sleazation and The Face and his project Teenagers was shortlisted for the Discovery Award at Rencontres D'Arles in 2004. He published Open Mic three years later which explored the burgeoning Grime music scene in East London, and which went on to collect a D&AD award for photographic publishing. In 2013 Dazed and Confused magazine approached Spencer to direct an eight-minute documentary film exploring the UK Garage scene. This was picked up by Channel 4 and a 23-minute version was broadcast on national television in March 2014, followed by a documentary about Grime, based on his Open Mic book, broadcast that November.



**Kick Over the Statues by Ewen Spencer. Exhibition at Fabrica, 2016, courtesy the artist**

Kick over the statues was co-commissioned with and shown as part of Brighton Photo Biennial 2016, whose wider theme: Beyond the Bias – Reshaping Image, explored photography's role in defining and informing our understanding of subjects such as gender and sexuality, the representation of the body, the politics of style, subcultures and the subversion of social and cultural norms.  
<http://2016.bpb.org.uk/>

### **CONTENT AND REVERBERATION**

Spencer embarked on an entirely new series of images for the exhibition, choosing Notting Hill Carnival, an established festival rooted and located in London's Caribbean community, on the last weekend in August, as the place to be.

His beautifully composed images of young people (some of his subjects are actually in their 30's) dressed to impress on the streets of Notting Hill show a generation at ease with the complex, multi-ethnic, everchanging milieu they are part of.

Self-aware, composed, creatively and socially eclectic they communicate their identity and place in the world through the language of clothing and personal styling, drawing on a rich global and constantly evolving cultural history.



**Kick Over the Statues by Ewen Spencer. Exhibition at Fabrica, 2016, courtesy the artist**



## STREET CRED BY TED POLHEMUS

In 1947 Jack Kerouac was on the road, criss-crossing America in a journey that would become the novel *On the Road*. Arguably the most influential stylist of the 20th century, Kerouac often wore sportswear such as sweatshirts and sneakers and workwear such as jeans made from denim. Previously sportswear had been worn only for sport and workwear only for work. Together with other Beats, Kerouac kickstarted a revolution in leisurewear which today in the 21st century dominates how most of the world dresses.

Arriving in San Francisco, Jack Kerouac and his friend Neal Cassidy immediately headed out to hear hipster jazz musician Slim Gaillard whom they christened 'god'. Interestingly, while the Beats worked at dressing down, their African-American jazz heroes dressed up in ultra flash and flamboyant zoot suits accessorized with huge, gold watch chains and hand-painted ties as wide as the day is long.

Elsewhere in California in 1947 gangs of 'no good punk' motorcyclists were roaring into towns like the then sleepy Hollister CA and taking the place over until, having drunk the bars dry, they got on their bikes and roared out as suddenly as they had arrived. The 4th July 1947 mayhem in Hollister was made into the film *The Wild One* starring the young Marlon Brando wearing a Perfecto black leather jacket, greasy jeans, motorcycle boots and a cynical sneer.

But sartorially the big news of 1947 was Christian Dior's New Look, which with its pinched-in waist and wide, long skirt announced that, WW2 only just over, Paris was back as the capital of all things fashionable, avant-garde and desirable. This was not just a new look, this was The New Look at a time when fashion had the power to dictate what women wore from Paris to Melbourne. Intended only for the ultra wealthy elite, the ultra famine silhouette of Dior's New Look would trickle down to the likes of my mother in suburban, middle-class America.

Would designers like Dior have been interested in the new subcultural street-styles emerging in America? Absolutely not. Fashion's power and price tag derived from its unshakable arrogance and presumption of a monopoly of taste and visual creativity. It wouldn't be until the 1980s that designers like Jean Paul Gaultier and even Saint Laurent would be producing their own astronomically priced versions of classic streetstyle garments like the black leather Perfecto and dispatching their cool hunters to check out what was being worn on street corners in the black ghettos and on the wrong side of the tracks. The unprecedented shift from capital C High Culture to the democracy of popular culture was and is most profoundly symbolised in that mythic domain



**Kick Over the Statues** by Ewen Spencer. Exhibition at Fabrica, 2016, courtesy the artist

of The Street. While fashion had always been at home indoors, in private, by invite only, streetstyle was always at home hanging out on the corner - the all the world's a stage of the street corner where all and sundry could strut their stuff.

Fashion, the ultimate expression of that optimism and presumption - that change equals progress - began to go out of fashion in the mid-1970s when, as the post-war economic boom began to fizzle out in the light of oil shortages, strikes and competition from the East, the description trendy flipped from being a compliment to a put-down. By the 1980s no one wanted to be a fashion victim. Instead of the never-ending novelty of The New, now the objective of consumption was to signify The Real, The Steadfast and Unchanging - in a word, the Authentic. And that would clearly be found not on the catwalk where professional models were transformed by professional stylists and designers.



While the ultimate expression of modernism had been ever-changing fashion, the ultimate expression of the newly emerging post-modern age was the do-it-yourself, astoundingly eclectic streetstyle of the mid-1970s Punks - their stage the wrong, cheap as chips, appropriately named World's End end of the King's Road, or the impressively seedy St Mark's Place in Manhattan.

**Kick Over the Statues by Ewen Spencer. Exhibition at Fabrica, 2016, courtesy the artist**

Today few of us look like stereotypical Punks - but most of us have taken on board their eclecticism, sampling and mixing unlikely stylistic juxtapositions, and their underlying assumption that authenticity is born of doing our own thing rather than submitting to the dictates of professional designers and stylists. And, like those early Punks, we know that the only true arena for our presentation of self is that now sacred, ultimately mythic domain, The Street.

As apparently happens when matter and anti-matter come into contact, when fashion and streetstyle got into bed together both, in a sense, were annihilated. Fashion lost the power to dictate a single look which one and all will sheepishly follow and it lost that single, coherent direction which was possible only within the straight-arrow lineal history of modernism. Streetstyle, meanwhile, has been cool hunted to extinction - the moment something exciting and authentic pops up there are so many market researchers, trend spotters, journalists and cool hunters ready and waiting with their cameras that it withers under the heat of the spotlights.

But The Street survives - even thrives. In the age of the po-mo simulacrum where everything is a copy of a copy of a copy, The Street is looked to as the one and only place capable of conferring authenticity and credibility: Street Cred. In the one and only true arena where reality is real, Brando in his Perfecto, Kerouac or better yet, Neal Cassidy in distressed denim (distressed by



sleeping in ditches rather than by patent-pending distressing machine) can reach down from their hipster heaven and sanctify you.

If you search for 'street style' on Google today what you get is uncountable sites showing real people self-photographed on the street. More often than not the most popular of these sites (such as Face Hunter, The Sartorialist, Style Arena or Street Style Aesthetic by Wayne Tippets) show us real people who might be fashion bloggers or other industry professionals on their way into a designer fashion show but the key thing is that they are shown in that sacred arena of authenticity, The Street. Once simply the means (however unpleasant) of getting from one place to another, The Street has now become Where It Is At - a destination rather than a means of getting to some destination, that unique environment where believers believe the simulacrum is slain and the real reborn.



**Kick Over the Statues by Ewen Spencer. Exhibition at Fabrica, 2016, courtesy the artist**

### **RELINQUISHING CONTROL**

The exhibition title, Kick over the statues was suggested by Ewen Spencer, who on remembering it as the name of an old Redskins song, felt it accurately reflected his observance of youth style - that the next generation would, should and do push over the culture of their elders in order to replace it with their own.

“We decided to take Ewen’s exhibition title as a provocation for developing Fabrica’s audience development project for TIPP, by posing the question, “What happens when young people take over the gallery?” “As a cultural institution this question and its potential outcomes ranging from glorious success to utter disaster generated excitement and terror in equal measure. To relinquish curatorial control is perhaps the most torturous aspect of relinquishing power for a cultural programmer. However, fear and institutional habit was to be resisted. If we really want young people to feel at home at Fabrica, and for young people to have agency and a place in civic society, then we must let them make their own decisions.” Liz Whitehead

“Liz, artist Lindsey Smith and I discussed the idea of a young people’s gallery takeover happening at Fabrica on the last weekend of the Biennial as the culmination of a larger project that Photoworks was developing for young people during the Biennial. After advertising the opportunity widely to young people 13-19 years old, The State of Control collective was borne. Largely comprising 13-15 year olds including several who had been part of Photoworks’ Photography Club, the State of Control collective worked over 15 sessions with a number of artists including Lynn Weddle, Ewen Spencer, and Lindsey Smith

(as artist facilitator) to explore individual and collective identity. The collective produced other works during the Biennial resulting in an exhibition at the local Jubilee Library and a short film that was screened at Fabrica during Cinecity Film Festival in November 2016.” Juliette Buss

“The gallery takeover was an ambitious project for the collective. They had to run a three-hour drop-in event at Fabrica, whilst the exhibition was running. Ewen Spencer graciously gave his consent. Spencer had conceived the exhibition as a street scene with the photographs printed onto billboard sized posters pasted onto a series of interlocking walls. Dimly lit, they implied alleyways and courtyards – the very places in real life that most people would have seen Spencer’s photographs. I knew we’d be able to replace images if they did get damaged but I prayed nothing would. Spencer was much more relaxed about it, confessing he was half expecting an image to get graffitied during the exhibition run anyway.” Liz Whitehead

“Planning specifically for the event took place over three evening sessions. Whilst the idea of a takeover was established at the outset, exactly how the event would function and what it would look like was completely up for negotiation with the group. Initially the idea of a takeover wasn’t immediately understood by all of the group members, so I presented a series of possibilities as starting points. I researched contacts, practical issues, health and safety considerations and costs, then fed back to the group who decided what to prioritise.” Lindsey Smith

“As an artist facilitator, I have supported young people in organising a range of events including a Flash Mob and Museum Take Over at Royal Pavilion & Museums, Brighton & Hove, and during the 2008 Brighton Photo Biennial I supported a group of young people to occupy Jubilee Square as part of a project with Anthony Lam. This project was my first gallery takeover.” Lindsey Smith

“When there is a strong and genuine connection between a subject and young people, the opportunity for those young people to feel empowered and own an activity related to that subject is significantly increased. However, any project that strives to be youth-led needs to recognise that there is a concerted effort at play behind the power shift. In this instance there was a carefully staged journey laid out for the young people prior to them being able to take on the challenge of a youth takeover. Lindsey was crucial to supporting the participants through this by giving them the opportunity to engage with Ewen Spencer’s work, develop their own visual language, skill set and interests before they authored their own takeover.” Juliette Buss



**Kick Over the Statues by Ewen Spencer. Exhibition at Fabrica, 2016, courtesy the artist**

“Held on a Saturday afternoon the State of Control Takeover involved Dj-ing and graffiti workshops with professional artists Matthew Davids and Tom Goulden and a photographic activity Put Yourself in the Picture led by the collective with Fabrica and Photoworks volunteers. Giant games (Jenga and Twister) were set up for people to use and free tea, coffee, popcorn, and subsidised ice cream was offered. A lounging area was created using bean bags which encouraged people to stay longer. Over 1000 people attended the event and exhibition that afternoon.” Juliette Buss.

“On the afternoon of the takeover the atmosphere in the gallery was incredible. Noisy, exciting, seemingly chaotic in parts, it had a visceral energy that drew in curious visitors of all ages. Strangely Spencer’s images became a backdrop to the very teen spirit they evoked. The excitement stayed with me long after the three hours of madness.” Liz Whitehead



“In the long term the takeover experience has confirmed the value of a co-produced approach especially with young people. This direction is one Fabrica is increasingly adopting in its engagement practice.” Liz Whitehead

**Kick Over the Statues by Ewen Spencer. Exhibition at Fabrica, 2016, courtesy the artist**

**NOTES:**

The work of Ted Polhemus, American anthropologist, writer, and photographer focuses on fashion and anti-fashion, identity, and the sociology of style and of the body – his objective is to explore the social and communicative importance of personal expression in style. He has written or edited more than a dozen books and contributed many of the photographs that appear in them. He was the creator and curator of Streetstyle, an exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London in 1994 and its accompanying publication of the same name was published by Thames & Hudson. This publication was updated and published by Photographic Youth Music Culture Archive (PYMCA) in 2010. A revised and expanded version of his Fashion & Anti-fashion was published in 2011. Recently he has been exploring the social and cultural impact of the baby boom generation. BOOM! - A Baby Boomer Memoir, was published in 2012.

Liz Whitehead is Director at Fabrica and was one of the original cofounders of the gallery in 1996. She leads on the artistic and educational strategy, working with senior colleagues to deliver the artistic programme and fundraising.

Ted Polhemus / The work of Ted Polhemus, American anthropologist, writer, and photographer focuses on fashion and anti-fashion, identity, and the sociology of style and of the body – his objective is to explore the social and communicative importance of personal expression in style. He has written or edited more than a dozen books and contributed many of the photographs that appear in them. He was the creator and curator of *Streetstyle*, an exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London in 1994 and its accompanying publication of the same name was published by Thames & Hudson. This publication was updated and published by Photographic Youth Music Culture Archive (PYMCA) in 2010. A revised and expanded version of his *Fashion & Anti-fashion* was published in 2011. Recently he has been exploring the social and cultural impact of the baby boom generation. *BOOM! - A Baby Boomer Memoir*, was published in 2012.

Juliette Buss is responsible for developing the Learning and Engagement programme for Photoworks, and has worked with Brighton Photo Biennial since its inception in 2003, being responsible for devising and implementing its successful education programme. She has nearly twenty years experience of working in the visual arts, heritage and education sector with a strong track record in fundraising, strategic development, commissioning, multi-agency project management and evaluation. Previous freelance work includes large-scale research and evaluation projects, programme management, and developing learning resources for teachers with clients such as NESTA, Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), Wellcome Trust, Towner Gallery, De La Warr Pavilion, Clore Duffield Foundation, Victoria & Albert Museum, Turner Contemporary and the British Film Institute. Juliette is an Editorial Advisory Board member for *Engage* (Journal).

Lindsey Smith is a freelance Artist Educator specialising in photography and moving image. Based in Brighton since 2001, Lindsey has over ten years experience of working in partnership with arts, education and community organisations to design and deliver high-quality projects, exhibitions, and events. Lindsey's artistic practice is rooted in the photographic. Her moving image works and installations evoke a disquieting enquiry into the experience of place and time by drawing attention to the melancholic desire that the photographic image and impulse unveil. Lindsey gained an MA in Photography with Distinction from University of Brighton in 2010 and is a co-director of APEC – an artist studios based in Hove.

# 16 CHAPTER FABRICA

by Magdalena  
Tyżlik-Carver

## You're Never Alone With Your Mobile Phone: Experiences of Intimacy<sup>1</sup>

INTRODUCTION BY  
LIZ WHITEHEAD, FABRICA

In 2016 in partnership with Brighton Digital Festival and Dr Cecile Chevalier, Lecturer in Media Practice, University of Sussex, Elly Clarke was selected for a small-scale commission, Remote Intimacy.

As one of Fabrica's two commissions for TIPP Remote Intimacy was tasked with investigating human to human contact and intimacy across geographical distance, as it is increasingly mediated and entangled with nonhuman others. This thematic had first been explored at the opening conference for the Understanding Territoriality project via Mary Agnes Krell's paper on proxemics and digital intimacies.<sup>2</sup> The commission theme was developed by Elly Clarke to function as a series of live in-person and online performances, running over four days as part of Brighton Digital Festival 2016.

The Remote Intimacy commission was supported by AHCR Research Fellow, Dr Magdalena Tyżlik-Carver. A researcher and curator, Magdalena's interdisciplinary work investigates how computation influences contemporary cultural practices, a subject explored in her PhD thesis. Magdalena was based at University of Sussex and Fabrica for the duration of her fellowship (March-July 2016), where she researched *the ecologies of intimacy*<sup>3</sup>, focusing on if and how intimacy is experienced when mediated by contemporary computational technologies.



**Video still from *I Want to See You From a Different Perspective* by Elly Clarke for #Sergina, 2014**

<sup>1</sup> The first part of this title is a line from the song *Instantaneous Culture* by Elly Clarke.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Agnes Krell is Senior Lecturer in Media and Film Studies, University of Sussex

<sup>3</sup> <https://ecologiesofintimacy.wordpress.com/>



So that intimacy of mind established between us was a bond, indeed, but an obscure and austere one, not so much admitting further light (as I had expected it to) as showing the extent of the darkness.

Ursula K. LeGuin



Video still from *Instantaneous Culture*, by Elly Clarke for #Sergina 2013

Migration into the digitally networked sphere of human encounters

has been taking place for some time now. Networked infrastructures of the Internet and the World Wide Web started as glorious examples of neutral spaces, located away from the centres of power while assuring individual freedoms for all.<sup>4</sup> Today when half the world population is online and in the UK almost all adults aged 16–24 use social media regularly, the story is rather more complex.<sup>5</sup> Our social lives move online as we meet and friend people on Facebook, via WhatsApp or Snapchat and we increasingly become more intimate in this online social space. Experiences of friendship, love and intimacy are transformed; we are surprised by online intimacy and at the same time it seems that intimacy online is not possible.

Intimacy is often associated with love and friendship and is regularly used as a euphemism for sexual contact and satisfaction. In either case it is believed to encompass a particular kind of accomplishment, an experience of wholeness of the self, or a wholeness achieved when in a close relationship with another. Through defining our most personal feelings and therefore being closest to our ‘inner self’, intimacy can be expressed as the ability ‘to communicate with the sparest of signs and gestures’.<sup>6</sup> This kind of intimacy results from a particular kind of self-knowledge; being in touch with one’s own feelings allows a person to be able to know themselves better and deeper.

The self-knowledge that arises from intimacy is a condition of the self-government of rational beings.<sup>7</sup> The experience of the self as a rational being suggests that intimacy is ‘a matter of degree rather than kind’,<sup>8</sup> as it marks the depth of knowledge about the self: intimate self-knowledge as a process of knowing. However, in the seventeenth century, when the word intimacy first entered the English language, it was connected to a rational practice through which the self emerged as an objectified and disengaged entity, able to rationally reflect on the actions and emotions of the subject. It allowed man (sic!) to relate to himself in a rational and civilised manner, producing a particular humanist subject of “rational man”. This subjectivity was only available to white men of certain social status, leaving space for ‘an other who may or may not enter into an intimate relation with the self.’<sup>9</sup>

In Plato’s *Symposium*, the character Aristophanes delivers a speech describing early mythical people.<sup>10</sup> They combined both female and

<sup>4</sup> Net neutrality is a principle that all data, users and platforms are treated the same by the Internet service providers who transfer data, and government and related agencies who regulate laws and standards that govern the Internet. For introductory reading on the subject, see Wikipedia entry for net neutrality and post blog by the inventor of the Web Sir Tim Berners-Lee, <http://dig.csail.mit.edu/breadcrumbs/node/144>.

<sup>5</sup> For Internet Usage Statistics visit <http://www.internetworld-stats.com/stats.htm> and <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/itandinternetindustry/bulletins/internetusers/2016>

<sup>6</sup> Lauren Berlant, *Intimacy: A Special Issue, Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998): 281.

<sup>7</sup> Oswin and Olund, *Governing Intimacy*.

<sup>8</sup> See for example: Richard E. Sexton, *Intimacy. A Historical Perspective*, in *Intimacy*, ed. Martin Fisher and George Stricker (New York: Plenum Press, 1982); Chris Rojek, *Presumed Intimacy: Parasocial Interaction in Media, Society and Celebrity Culture* (John Wiley & Sons, 2015); Natalie Oswin and Eric Olund, *Governing Intimacy. Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28, no. 1 (February 1, 2010): 60–67, doi:10.1068/d2801ed. Other examples include popular literature and self-help guides on the subject.

<sup>9</sup> Oswin and Olund, *Governing Intimacy*.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 60–61.

male features, had four arms, legs and ears, two sets of genitals and two faces on one head, each face set in opposite directions. They were strong and proud people who decided to assault the gods and for this they were punished by Zeus who cut them in two. In his speech, delivered in praise of love (Eros), Aristophanes describes how, since those earliest times, we humans have been only separated tokens that have to be brought together 'because we are sliced like fillets of sole, two out of one; and so each is always in search of his own token.' In the story it is Eros that is 'the bringer-together' and the 'healer' of human nature. The popular idea that intimacy can only be experienced by people in a close relationship, completing each other through love, can be seen as having its beginnings in this speech. What also becomes clear in Aristophanes' speech is the connection between intimacy, power and governance. The gods' fear of people led to this slicing and dividing into two while creating the need for intimacy among humans. To find the self as another is a focus of human life according to Aristophanes, but it can also be seen as a way to govern.



Video still from Trailer for *#Sergina's Stimulatingly Sexy Simultaneous Simulation of Herself* edited by Nicky Miller for #Sergina, 2016

The paradox of intimacy and its simultaneous connection to power can be traced in intimacy today. Displaying the personal in public as a form of self-revelation marks the experience of intimacy in the digital era. Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp or Google Search are a mix of private and public engagements. They are private because they are often (though not always) meant as a personal communication with friends and family, or as private searches for information. They are also private because the tools used for this communication belong to



private companies, often located somewhere in Silicon Valley. They are public because they contribute to creating an online public sphere through tweets and posts that comment on current affairs in politics or social life. Recorded for Vine,

Video still from *Instantaneous Culture*, by Elly Clarke for #Sergina 2013

uploaded to Instagram, or revealed on Snapchat, our intimate moments are no longer restricted to private rooms or homes, nor are they shared with closest friends or lovers, as registered users routinely sign away any rights to the content they create or contribute to the company that owns the platform they use. Such content can be revealed repeatedly online, infinitely tagged, linked, liked and logged and so any private content is already (potentially) public since there are myriad ways in which private and personal communication leaks out into the open.



How do we rethink intimacy for the digital age? Could the phenomenon of fake news or desire for authenticity in social media be other ways through which contradictions that pull intimacy and power together are played out online? Today when we connect not just with people but platforms and algorithms in what is referred to as an extreme sharing culture, are we able to achieve intimacy as self-knowledge, close friendship or love?

These questions are at the heart of #Sergina's queer life that presents itself as a multi-bodied, gender-ambiguous and multi-locationable persona performing simultaneously offline and online, most often in *places beginning with B*, in Facebook and Instagram posts and Soundcloud, Vimeo and YouTube uploads.<sup>11</sup> #Sergina is 'a border straddling drag princess with a mobile phone obsession.' She exists through appearances on social media and in her poetry.



<sup>11</sup> See Sergina's social media: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCoIcthG1GopxFhGL-BCOepQw>, <https://soundcloud.com/ser-gina>, <http://theultima-tesergina.tumblr.com/>, [@sergina](https://www.facebook.com/sergina/), <https://www.facebook.com/sergina/>

**Performance still from #Sergina's *Stimulatingly Sexy Simultaneous Simulation of Herself* at the Marlborough Theatre in Brighton, Belgrade and Berlin - at Kulturni Centar GRAD - with Vladimir Bjelicic. Photo: Vesna Lalić**

She is mediated and like any social media user, she is profiled while sustaining a constant relationship with algorithmic processes. Created and regularly impersonated by Berlin-based artist Elly Clarke, #Sergina sings about trying to love and her desire to 'exist and get laid in a world that is increasingly experienced through screens' and 'in a society that is increasingly narcissistic.'<sup>12</sup> Yet, the identity of #Sergina is not fixed to any one organic body, but is (in the words of #Sergina's manifesto) up for grabs, a transferable (viral) identity that can be played (out) and worn (out) on different bodies thus further disrupting the idea of intimacy or any true reflection of a single, authentic self.

<sup>12</sup> Elly Clarke's statement about #Sergina.

#Sergina comments on the instantaneous culture of 24/7 contact in which we are never alone with a mobile phone.<sup>13</sup> She contemplates seductive illusions presented on screens, that grow tired almost as soon as they appear. New light, new hair colour, but also a different perspective and another photo angle are all ways to present oneself as interesting, exciting, new and different while attempting to sustain some kind of originality every time you appear on the screen of a mobile phone or a computer.<sup>14</sup> Contact turns into a tedious task of updating online status while #Sergina's question, 'how can we stay next to each other so long?' points to the diminishing capacity for a deeper connection with another person.

<sup>13</sup> *Instantaneous Culture* by Elly Clarke on Soundcloud: <https://soundcloud.com/ser-ginainstantaneousculture>, Vimeo: [vimeo.com/95290394](https://vimeo.com/95290394); Early punk version with old band in Berlin: <https://soundcloud.com/theodorstorm/instantaneous-culture>

<sup>14</sup> *I want to see you from a different perspective* by Elly Clarke on Soundcloud: <https://soundcloud.com/ser-gina/i-want-to-see-you-from-a-different-perspective>; Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/101806921>

When Lauren Berlant, an American scholar of literature, says that ‘the personal is the general’ and that ‘publics presume intimacy,’ she refers to a particular kind of public sphere where identities (of women, queers, blacks, etc.) are performed together as



an intimate state of belonging.<sup>15</sup> Berlant’s scholarship on the ‘intimate public’, follows what she defines as ‘women’s culture’ as represented in nineteenth and twentieth-century American literature and its film and screen adaptations. Female fantasy and disappointment is played out in sensational dramatic literature of the past as well as in contemporary reality TV shows that she considers to be melodramas of mass precariousness under neoliberalism. Berlant therefore binds the intimate public to experiences of belonging and immediacy that can be produced by different media and literary styles and genres, as well as by social and political situations.<sup>16</sup>

This ‘women’s culture’ is different from the culture of the rational man and the disengagement and presumed objectivity that this subject offers. It is sentimental, ‘a discourse of disappointment’ and often in first person—a female complaint.<sup>17</sup> According to Berlant, intimacy becomes a public matter that imagines the life of a citizen and follows ‘the migration of intimacy’ between the public and the domestic.<sup>18</sup> The melodrama of digital life, continuously recorded, updated and broadcasted is #Sergina’s aesthetic. She longs for physical contact and one of her songs is a list of complaints that reflects her desire to be close to her lover:

<i>Phone me</i>	<i>I'm here</i>	<i>Touch my skin</i>
<i>Don't write</i>	<i>Touch me</i>	<i>It's real</i>
<i>Talk to me</i>	<i>I'm good.</i>	<i>Smell me</i>
<i>Don't text</i>	<i>Phone me</i>	<i>I'm alive</i>
<i>Come and see me</i>	<i>Don't write</i>	<i>Taste me</i>
<i>Don't chat</i>	<i>Talk to me</i>	<i>I'm delicious</i>
<i>Kiss me</i>	<i>Don't text</i>	<i>Feel me</i>
<i>Don't skype</i>	<i>Come and see me</i>	<i>I'm sensational</i>
<i>Drop by</i>	<i>Don't chat</i>	<i>See me</i>
<i>Don't blog</i>	<i>Kiss me</i>	<i>I'm gorgeous</i>
<i>Fuck me</i>	<i>Don't skype</i>	<i>Hear me</i>
<i>Don't be polite</i>	<i>Drop by</i>	<i>I vibrate</i>
<i>Touch me</i>	<i>Don't blog</i>	<i>Taste me</i>
<i>Don't imagine</i>	<i>Fuck me</i>	<i>I'm unique</i>
<i>Come and get me</i>	<i>I'm here</i>	<i>Feel me</i>
<i>I'm here</i>	<i>Touch me</i> <sup>19</sup>	

**Video still from *Phone Me Don't Write* by Elly Clarke for #Sergina, 2013-14**

**15** Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture*, Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2008

**16** Lauren Berlant and Jay Prosser, *Life Writing and Intimate Publics: A Conversation with Lauren Berlant*, *Biography* 34, no. 1 (2011): 180–87, doi:10.1353/bio.2011.0008.

**17** Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, 13.

**18** Berlant, *Intimacy: A Special Issue*, " 284.

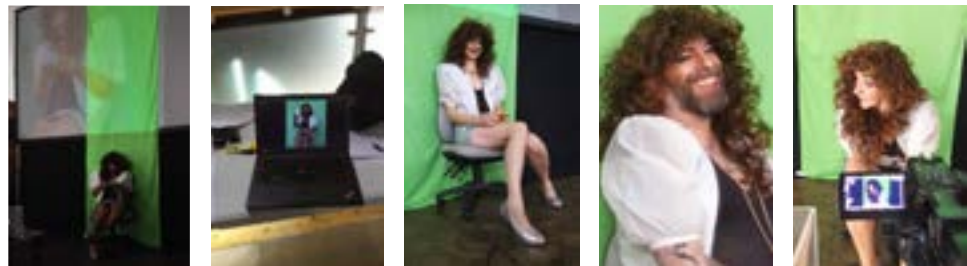
**19** *Phone me, Don't Write* by Elly Clarke on soundcloud: <https://soundcloud.com/ser-gina/>

Somewhere underneath this is a nostalgic recollection of a life that is not mediated and of contact that is not networked. The fantasy is for bodies to touch each other, to feel and be felt, to see each other not from a distance and on a screen but here and now, together. Moving a finger over the phone screen from one side to the other and stroking a face of a lover or a friend are the same gesture that reveals just how close we are to others and how close we become with things always in reach. #Sergina's intimacy is suspended between desire and attachment, between the deeply personal and shared, while the materiality of intimacy includes the remote bodies of those whose presence she desires as well as the "bodies" that she is increasingly attached to, including mobile phones and social media.



Video still from *Instantaneous Culture*, by Elly Clarke for #Sergina 2013

Is it intimacy or the lack of it that #Sergina performs in her online appearances? Perhaps she embodies the two states simultaneously and with her drag queen act she makes this available to



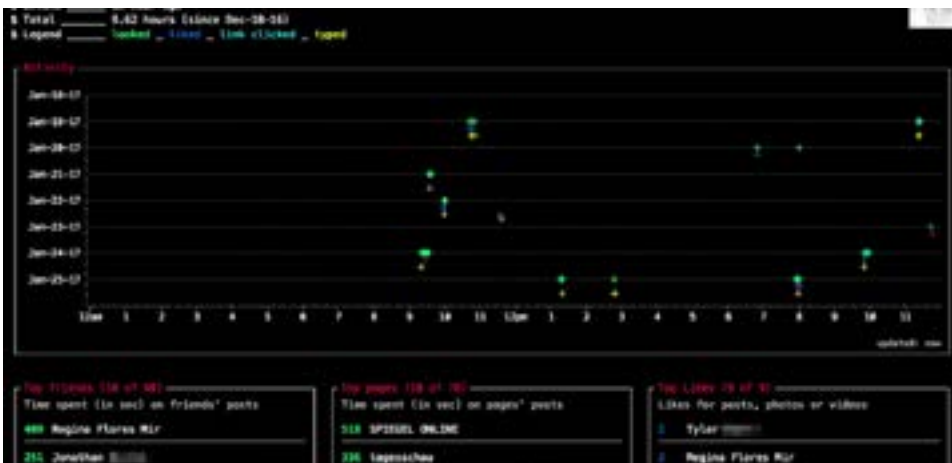
others to perform and to experience in the confusion of #Sergina's drag body. The performance re-imagines a life not as a queer body, but through a queer experience of relations that normally go without saying and are enacted daily and as such create infrastructures that frame our lives. It is not just women's culture but human culture that is updated for the digital condition.

People meet each other in the space that does not (yet?) feel like home. They move into environments that are shared with millions of others simultaneously. They inhabit spaces together with algorithmic processes; their bodies next to coltan-induced mobile phones or digital objects, always on, always looking for another way to connect to the network. Scrolling, clicking and linking, these are the gestures of making data. And so to grow and generate more data, online life is a series of interactions with hyperlinks and cookies, with images and sounds, with physical and digital objects, with others. Humans, bots or spiders<sup>20</sup> make browsing histories and crawling patterns together as they reach for information and data. Bodies are always present yet invisible to each other.

Is this where intimacy has migrated to, pulled by desire for another life? As we scroll, look, like, click, link, type, we reveal ourselves to data mining and big data algorithms. Data generated through Facebook likes provides enough information for a computer to make a better judgement about us than our average work colleague (10 Likes), cohabitant or friend (70-150 Likes) or life partner (300 Likes).<sup>21</sup> Intimacy now takes place not just between humans. Technological infrastructures support our communication with another (non) human while an unsatisfied thirst for more data, for big data, accompanies every experience of life online. This is where intimacy happens, between

Performance shots from #Waiting for Ice-Cream / Waiting for #Sergina: Private Performance/ Instantaneous Newsreel at Fabrica, September 2016. Fabrica's commission, Remote Intimacy, was presented at Brighton Digital Festival 2016. Participants were invited to perform #Sergina's song *Waiting for Ice Cream* during a two-day experiment to 'open source Sergina'. Both days were recorded with Google Hangouts and broadcasted online. Documentation is now available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ik-KjL3Xy7A&feature=youtu.be&a>. As part of the Remote Intimacy commission #Sergina also performed during the festival with *I Got My Phone in my Wallet Ghetoblaster Induced Flash Mob* #Sergina-cise fun run through Brighton, performing the song with a group of participating women; and *Sergina's Stimulatingly Sexy Simulations of Herself in Places Beginning with B* in Brighton, Belgrade and Berlin with Elly Clarke and Katy Pendlebury in Brighton's Marlborough Theatre & Pub, with Thomas Duh at Silver Future in Berlin, and with Vladimir Bjelicic in Kulturni centar grad in Belgrade. For more information about these events see #Sergina's Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/sergina/>.

people and machines speaking different languages. Communicating with and about each other, them and us.



A screen shot from the film *Digital Selfie*, explaining how the Chrome extension plug-in helps you learn what data Facebook knows about you by logging your behaviour on the Facebook platform. Source <https://vimeo.com/201178499>

**20** A spider is a program, a version of a bot which is also called a Web crawler whose purpose is to browse Web pages for Web indexing.

**21** Wu Youyou, Michal Kosinski, and David Stillwell, *Computer-Based Personality Judgments Are More Accurate than Those Made by Humans*, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 112, no. 4 (January 27, 2015): 1036–40, doi:10.1073/pnas.1418680112.

Intimacy's location, as private and often related to the home, is changing. The infrastructures that house intimacy are no longer contained within physical boundaries that offer environments where innermost secrets and knowledge can be shared between the closest of friends or lovers. Today, intimacy is expressed across media and can be born out of routine gestures that are performed in public, such as liking a Facebook post when commuting to work. This 'diasporic intimacy' that migrates into another place is dystopian and 'rooted in suspicion of a single home'.<sup>22</sup> It does not promise fulfilment of belonging and authenticity but is precarious and available through stories and secrets that are not told directly nor intimately. It is remote, distant, yet it is this intimacy that increasingly becomes ours.

**22** I borrow the concept of 'diasporic intimacy' from Svetlana Boym, whose take on intimacy, immigration and diaspora, is an inspiration and a guide in my continuous project of rethinking intimacy in the networked age. See Svetlana Boym, *On Diasporic Intimacy: Ilya Kabakov's Installations and Immigrant Homes*, *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998): 498–524.

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