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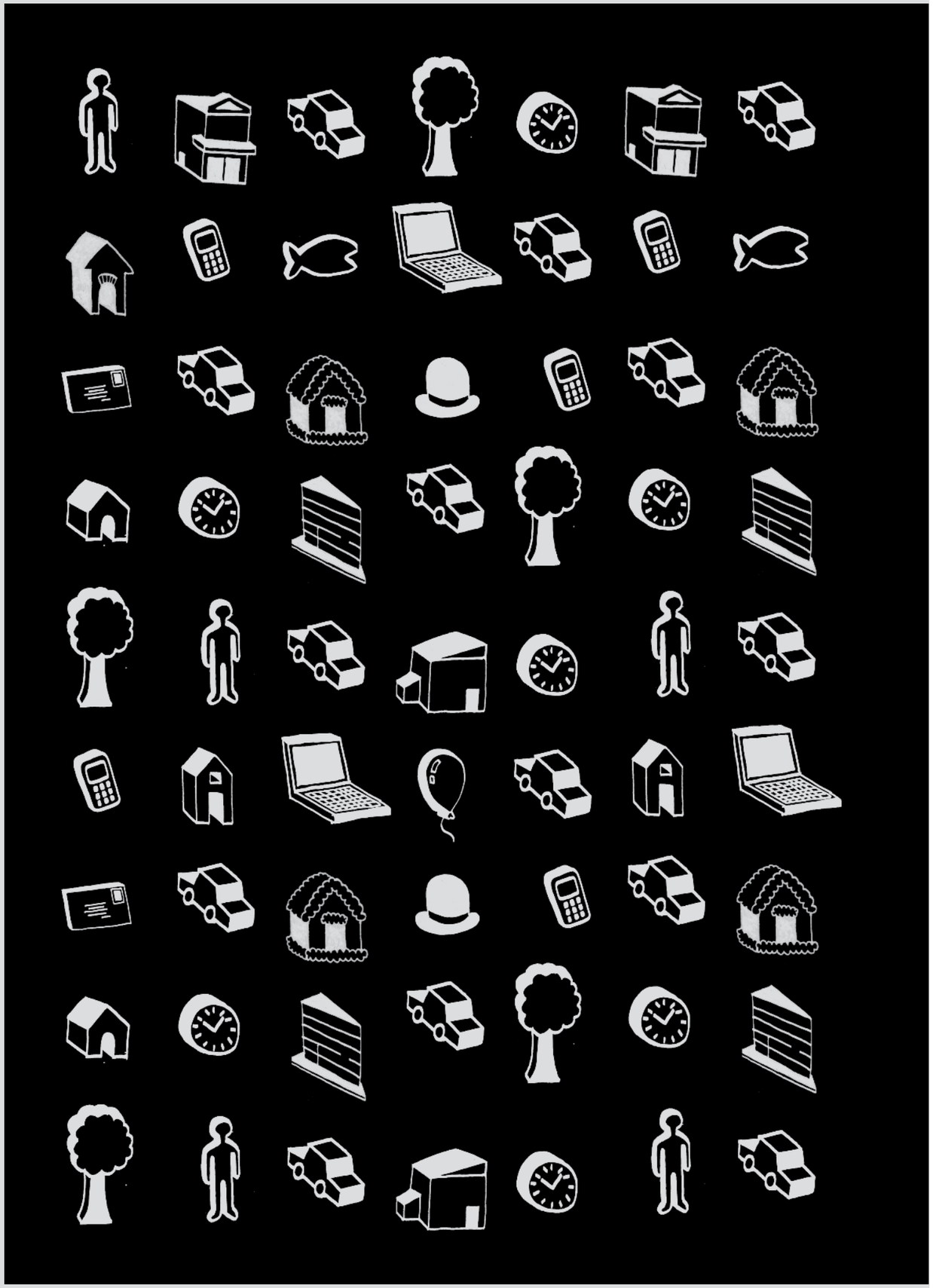

WAH

WE ARE HERE

NAVA

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION
FOR THE VISUAL ARTS LTD

firstdraft

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1 – 4 September 2011

A 2011 partnership project between NAVA and Firstdraft
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Published by the National Association for the Visual Arts, April 2012
Edited by Brianna Munting and Georgie Meagher
ISBN: 978-0-9872481-0-7

The Feeling Will Pass...

WAH Exhibition
Documentation & Texts

Artists:

Blood & Thunder
Cake Industries
Hossein Ghaemi
Sebastian Moody
Nervous Systems
S.E.R.I. (Carl Scrase)

Writers:

Biljana Jancic
Hugh Nichols
Michaela Gleave

The Feeling Will Pass...

Brianna Munting

The exhibition, much like the symposium, was an attempt to capture a moment, to engage both the physical and conceptual spaces of change. 'The Feeling Will Pass...' raised questions of what tactics can be enabled for creating states of anxiety and action that exist without the pervasiveness of the commodity high? It aimed to create meaning and change in an environment where the amorphous nature of capitalism co-opts our very existence.

Given the 'occupy' movements that are happening across the globe and the recent Qantas corporate stronghold, worker shut out and political sideshow, how do we enact change when collectivity and physicality are ritualistically ignored; when movements, actions, occupation are dismissed under the rubric of being non-representative or unreasonable? Why do we accept a state of 'reasonableness' a call for legitimacy but legitimacy from whom? Where is the state of play, the discursive moment or the 'splice' where we can intervene between the many frameworks of imposed 'reasonableness?' Is it in the gaps where we wake from these imposed realities?

The work by Nervous Systems, the collaboration between Rachael Haynes and Alice Lang titled '*Unworkable Action*', created a counterpoint, a dismantling of the idea of legitimacy and the authoritarian voice by creating a moment for anyone to say something, anything. A site to make your own protest sign was created in the gallery with responses ranging across the comedic, humorous, silly, critical and visual. Each sign was activated, inscribed as a site of expression. It was about giving voice to the individual as a collective, to create a spatial relationship between actions, ideas and people. The work was reliant on inclusionary actions of audiences, yet it provoked a serious comment on the capacity of collectivity to enact change as the object went unused; a symbol of what was, a discarded relic of history to line the walls. This transition from action, object to potentially saleable item, is reflective of the trajectory of dissidence where we see symbols and objects (protest posters, peace signs, Che Guevara) sold as commodities.

This issue of action and authorisation is also called into question in the work by Carl Scrase (S.E.R.I.). '*The Viral Poster Project*' aspirationally calls for a response to the question "Is our empathy on the rise?"; a series of steps audiences and potential provocateurs have to follow to engage with the work. It is not static but an interjection into the everyday. It explores the consequences of our actions as in a public space we are on show, and our responses whether intuitive, visceral or thoughtful enact a social initiative and the work relies on this action. It is because of this reliance that the work is also unable to calculate or anticipate its own effect. Whilst there is almost a call to arms, its reading and action is left to the audience, to the community and to the engaged creating an uncertainty, an ambiguity in how we can create change and communicate with each other.

Whilst S.E.R.I's work predominately takes place outside the gallery, objects are left in the gallery space as triggers, propositional spaces that negotiate between the possibilities of reaction, engagement and change. Yet in this demand there is also an out clause, a keeping of anonymity, a space for ambiguity where actions become objects in a commodity market, one that is able to shift and morph with conceptual change and participatory practices.

Both works by Carl Scrase and Nervous Systems simultaneously precipitate the necessity of change whilst recognising the current environment, the narcotic haze in which we are drugged by the ideas of bright and shining ownership, where engagement has been depleted to the extent that it has been rendered meaningless. The artists are attempting to critique and perhaps undermine the assumptions about how we resist and in what capacity we can do so.

Michaela Gleave's work '*It Was Never Meant to Last (Big Time Love)*' challenges the commodification of the 'public space' by creating an intervention into a commercial world. It was a written celebration, inscribing the landscape with light, smoke and a burning will to see clearly through obfuscation. The work was a funeral pyre of love, a poetic action towards the past paying homage to the histories of artist led spaces, an infinite moment of celebration and giving. The work was encouraging us to love our communities, to recognise the changes in the landscape that action and activity deliver and the changing light, the positive energy. Yet this moment also creates an acknowledgement of our apathy and expectation as the discarded object, a burnt out indecipherable charge is rendered meaningless, stagnant in a constructed space.

We as citizens have disappeared from the landscape, our histories and lives rewritten for us by 'authorising voices'. This project was a moment to challenge, to erase and to redress our absence from this world. It was not just about inscription, a rewriting or a mapping, but an injunction, a new space for waking up, for literally lighting up and illuminating our past and present. It was focussed on moving outside our dulled states to agitate for ephemeral beauty, thought and agency.

The Feeling Will Pass... was an attempted insertion into apathy, reasonableness and accepted authority by presenting the uncomfortable, the unhinged, the unlikely. Spectatorship becomes activated where audiences inherently feel implicated in the work and question the issues being discussed by the artists[1] and are implicating themselves in an action, a thought of resistance. Insisting on this space for this agitation was the driving aim of The Feeling Will Pass...

Brianna Munting is the Brokerage and Strategy Manager for the National Association for the Visual Arts.

Notes

1 Thomas Hirschhorn 2011
http://www.canadianart.ca/online/features/2011/04/21/thomas_hirschhorn/

We are (momentarily) illuminated

Georgie Meagher

The passing of time uniquely underpins each of the works in *The Feeling Will Pass…*, a quality reflected in the title of this exhibition and the symposium project of which it was a part. As an exhibition component of *We Are Here,* the national ARI symposium held over 4 days in September 2011, *The Feeling Will Pass…*consisted of activities and situations that ranged from the spectacular to the intimate, with artists exploring popular culture, technology, power relations and conceptions of community as they exist in an Australian context.

In *Relational Aesthetics* Nicholas Bourriaud asserts "It is no longer possible to regard the contemporary [art]work as a space to be walked through…It is henceforth presented as a period of time to be lived through, like an opening to unlimited discussion". Because each work is, to use Bourriaud's phrase, 'lived through' via the engagement of audience members, it is difficult to imagine the already optimistic idea of 'unlimited discussion' as anything more than latent potential. The ephemerality of experience, memory and the exhibition project itself means that, for most, the feeling will indeed pass. Perhaps then as something of a response to the apathy a certain generation is too often condemned for, these spaces of encounter are designed to spark moments of self-reflection - illumination, even - on our relative situation in a globalising world.

Claire Bishop has remarked that, for some critics, "the creative energy of participatory practices rehumanises - or at least de-alienates - a society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalism". Utilising the hyper-capitalist frame of the market research session, Sebastian Moody's *I Am Here* prompts audience members to become complicit in a self-reflexive dissection of power relations. This occurs through a three-fold process: participation; spectatorship; and analysis/construction. Audiences begin by participating in a focus group, only after which they are invited to stand invisible behind a one-way mirror to watch the next group. This cyclical process of deception, revelation and voyeurism plays with the idea of *ressentiment,* the feeling of being treated unfairly after acting properly and honestly, particularly associated with late social capitalism. The ethical grey area that Moody places himself in is further complicated by the third component of his project: the use of participants' responses to create a new artwork. Bishop's 'creative energy', in this case, critically *enacts* the 'repressive instrumentality of capitalism' and places audience members at its centre.

In Blood & Thunder's work, *Exhibition Audience Survey Infographic Display*, audience members answer questions about themselves that are then translated into large graphs through the addition of hand-printed stickers complete with unique isotype designs. The artists, Kernow Craig and Mickie Quick, who also work together as a design collective, utilise the aesthetics of infographic displays to represent demographic data of participating audiences.

Martha Rosler commented that, "the most important distinctions amongst members of the art audience are those of social class, the weightiest determinant of one's relation to culture". With this work, Blood & Thunder revealed the participating 'art community' to itself. As the stickers rose, creating a bright bar graph against a backdrop of a map of Australia, the economic, social and cultural histories and experiences of attendees was disclosed.

Driven by instinct, dream-logic propels Hossein Ghaemi's characters, sometimes drawn or painted and in this case performed in their multiplicities by a choir of amateur singers. Wrestling with understandings of self as they are embedded in cultural experience, images and characters from popular culture emerge as beacons where history and contemporary experience collide. Annie is one such character, and the object of Ghaemi's latest investigation. The orphan, with a distinctive mop of bright red hair, is the central protagonist in the *The OOO in Who*. As it traverses the sinister and high-camp, the performance arouses a sense of unease: 'Annie' is no longer a person or even a character. Once a nostalgic symbol of childhood, she has, through ceaseless technological development, become an image, relentlessly reproduced and transfigured into an uncanny emblem of postmodern ubiquity.

Unlike Nervous Systems' protest signs, or Carl Scrase's S.E.R.I poster project, where audiences can choose to inscribe themselves, or their opinion, at least, onto the work, Cake Industries reverse this relationship by enveloping their audiences in what they describe as the "luminescene of a bygone future". Presenting an imagined perfect technological future, viewed from the past, by day all that can be seen is a grid of hanging paper lanterns tight against the ceiling of the front window of the gallery. By night, however, shafts of light are refracted through the mottled glass windows of the gallery onto the footpath. As the grid of lantern-pixels displays images and sequences of investigations, past passers-by are lit inconspicuously, illuminated by the soft glow of algorhythmic studies and pattern tests. This too passes in only a few steps.

Through the *We Are Here* symposium, future thinking occurred in equal parts as remembering our pasts and critically engaging with the 'now' of artist self-organisation and leadership (and its constant re-creation by artist participants). This critical engagement with the present moment both within artist-led culture and society at large is at the core of all of the works in *The Feeling Will Pass…*. Reflecting our own beliefs and desires as much as our impulse to act on or defend them, we are illuminated and, if only for a time, revealed to ourselves.

Georgie Meagher is an artist and curator with an interest in interdisciplinary and experimental artforms and practices.

Exhibition Audience Survey Infographic Display
Blood & Thunder

'Life is too short, prejudices too ineradicable, individual qualifications too specialized, and the personal equation too disturbing, to permit any single individual, however gifted, to see for himself (sic) **the community as a whole, and to measure the influences and forces that shape the family destiny'**
- Dr ET Devine, Publications of The American Sociological Society, 1908 p.85

For the *Feeling Will Pass...* exhibition, Blood & Thunder developed an 'Exhibition Audience Survey' to collect data on demographic characteristics and attitudes of visitors to the show. The survey was conducted face-to-face with an in-person interview by volunteer gallery attendants during the course of the exhibition.

The set of questions asked were as follows:

Where do you live?

What is the basis of your employment?
• Full-time
• Freelance/Casual
• Unemployed

What type of school did you go to?
• Public
• Private

Who do you pay for the roof over your head?
• Bank
• Landlord
• No-one

How do you effect political change?
• Petition & Lobby
• Graffiti
• Rally
• Purchase power

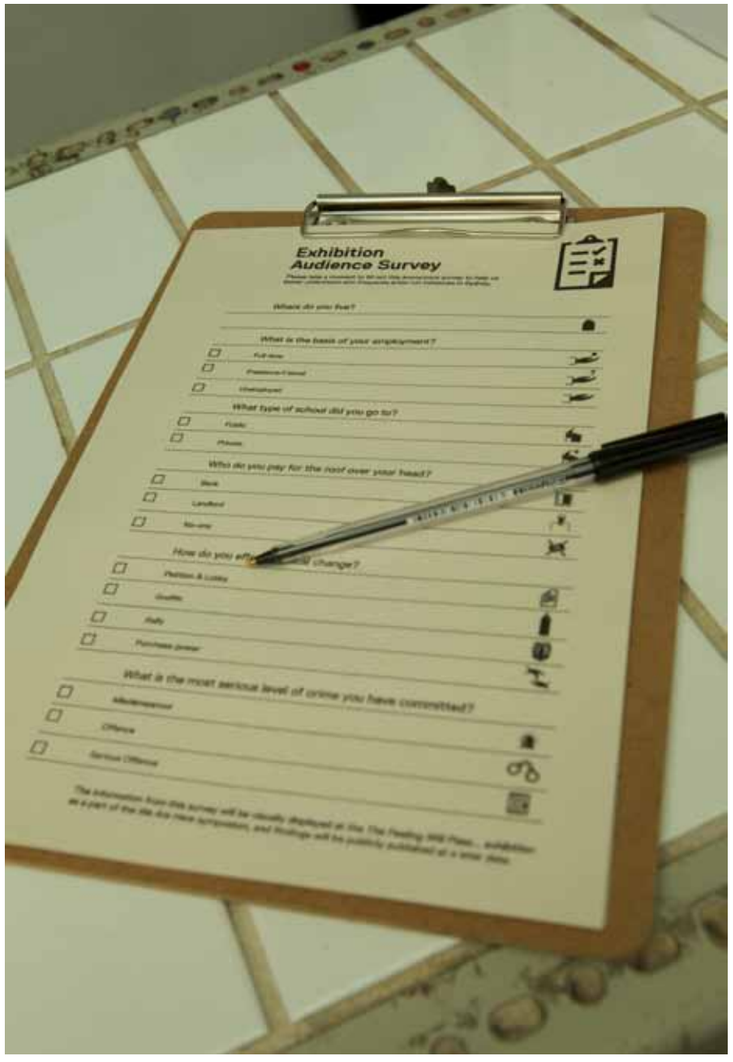
What is the most serious level of crime you have committed?
• Misdemeanor
• Offence
• Serious Offence

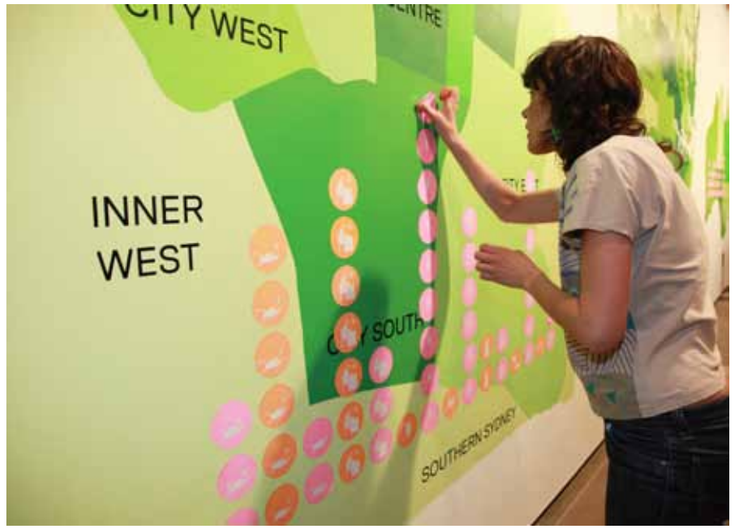
Each answer has a corresponding Isotype (International System of TYpographic Picture Education), designed by Blood & Thunder (recontextualising the work of Isotype pioneers Otto Neurath and Gerd Arntz). The selection of Isotypes were stencil-printed onto circular stickers, and were at-the-ready to be used by the gallery attendant in the data visualisation process.

The findings were presented instantly, allowing for an appreciation of the organic character of facts. At the conclusion of each survey undertaken, the attendant would take the findings, and in an additive presentation of them,

would stick down the corresponding isotype stickers to the 10 metre long data visualisation mural painted onto the wall of Gallery 1 at Firstdraft.
Each set of stickers were matched to the home location of the person surveyed. The mural took the form of a choropleth-like maps of Central Sydney, broken down into its inner city districts, Greater Sydney, broken down into its regions and Australia, broken down to its states and major cities.

Blood & Thunder is an interdisciplinary design studio specialising in print production. Founded by artist/activist Mickie Quick, designer/artist Kernow Craig and illustrator/artist Leigh Rigozzi, the studio provides design services to the corporate, government, and cultural sectors, in addition to launching its own art, design and publishing initiatives.





Images on p.7, previous page, above:
Blood & Thunder, Exhibition Audience Survey Infographic Display, 2011, Interactive survey, mural, stickers. Photography by D. Munting.

Tension Squared
Cake Industries

The future isn't smooth idevices and sleek lines; the future is fragile and temporary. Technology is embedded into every facet of society. Signs of wear and age are common. Exposed electronics and failing displays belie the sophisticated programming and design. Films such as *Blade Runner* and *Brazil* show this broken future. Elegance gives way to technological rot, and the people living amongst these wired surrounds are oblivious to the beauty of failure.

Tension Squared is an artefact from this future.

A series of found video test patterns built to demonstrate perfection, instead provide a sometimes broken and damaged scene that is played out amongst a grid of Chinese rice paper lanterns. By representing the individual pixel, each lantern forms one part of the complete arrangement. By congregating near and beneath this array, we experience luminescence of a bygone future.

Jesse Stevens founded Cake Industries to consolidate his diverse interests as well as provide his specialist media technology / obscure technology expertise.

Dean Petersen joined Cake Industries to apply his skills in photography, graphic design and web development to the media technology arena.

Image above and on right: Cake Industries (Dean Petersen and Jesse Stevens), Tension Squared 2011, New Media, 5 x 2.5m Microcontroller, LED Circuitry, Cabling, Nylon Rope, Paper Lanterns, Laptop. Photo by D. Munting.

The ooo in who?
Hossein Ghaemi

Earnest, humorous and intuitive, Ghaemi puts together idiosyncratic references to the spiritual and pop musical's theatrics. When he suppresses parts of himself, other hidden attributes start to surface. Ghaemi's work involves detecting the strange in the self, the uncanny moments when we release our hidden selves. Ghaemi willingly describes himself as "not the modest sort or penny-stricken when it comes to exploring the uncanny because simultaneously I already know of its strangeness. In fact I admit to being defeated by this way of thinking. It is not anguish but an understanding of being open to the elements of the unknown, a generative, exhilarating but undecidable happening where we are not able to see a decisive answer or pattern".

The uncanny is ghostly. It is convened with the strange, weird, and mysterious. It involves feelings of uncertainty, a crisis of the proper that entails a critical disturbance. It becomes a peculiar co-mingling of the familiar and unfamiliar. It can take the form of something recognisable and known unexpectedly arising from a strange and unfamiliar context. It makes the homely un-homely and this feeling of uncanniness can come from the most curious of coincidences. In *The ooo in who?* the artist explores the familiar/unfamiliar paradox as a slippage between the constructed familiarity and the sudden jolt into an unknown space.

The ooo in who? was developed around the artist's first viewing of the musical 'Annie' (the 1982 musical film by John Huston). Before watching the film, Ghaemi constructed an idea of this character Annie from popular lexicons of phrased songs such as 'tomorrow', or 'it's a hard knock life', her iconic look, with her flaming red hair, her cutie-pie red dress, and her strange ability to maintain adult emotions. Yet these constructions of Annie sat uncomfortably against the 'real' screen version. "To my surprise Annie was completely different from what I had wanted her to be. I guess I shouldn't be too surprised. This redheaded Fargo had been completely misrepresented and not what I thought she should be". It is here in this slippage that the uncanny occurs.

To some, the most haunting thing about the uncanny is 'the return of the dead'. Thoughts that stayed a secret and hidden for some reason and at some point in life suddenly start to surface. Ghaemi is expressing this tension of occupying a space where his assumptions and popular coding are unraveled to reveal the unsettling of historical layers, of personalities and of certainty. Annie is not who or what she was meant to be. This convergence, played out through the character Annie is an unraveling/revealing of the Annie 'truths' and the artist's affinity with Annie and simultaneous rejection of her. Ghaemi is forced to confront his own representation. "I found myself wanting to know exactly who is Annie? So I started searching on Google, and soon started to find Annie doubles, millions of girls who wanted to be Annie. She became a costume, and although Annie sings, she no longer has a voice. There was a certain stillness in her now...What is it about Annie?" Annie became the alien guest, the disfigured version of the original and in this acknowledgement, this occupation of Annie, the artist has his own secrets surface as his personal paradigms. Navigation of the world and assumptions are laid bare.

Yet in the work he realises when we reveal all, when we are overused, multiplied, co-opted and transformed through media, culture and our own paradigms, we need to find our ability to speak. In *The ooo in who?* Ghaemi is genuinely wanting to give personality back to Annie, not telling her who to be but letting her have her own 'ability to speak' or in this case 'sing'. He is forming a question of the 'who' rather than sourcing a remedy of answers to the 'what' and in the process interrogating the parts of himself which are hidden in the intuitive notions of the unconscious. Annie is creating a space, a vessel through which the artist's hidden layers become visible and the tensions of multiplicity become amplified.

Hossein Ghaemi is an emerging artist who was born in Iran. Ghaemi's diverse practice spans performance, painting and installation.

Images on p.13, previous page and above:
Hossein Ghaemi, The 'OOO' in 'Who' 2011, Choir performance
Dimensions variable. Photo by D Knierm.

The artist would like to thank Amelia W., Chris H., Chris M., Kate M., Meg H., Meg G-J., friends and family and most importantly a big thank you to Nahid Ghaemi.

It Was Never Meant To Last (BIG TIME LOVE)

Michaela Gleave

Pyrotechnics are a bit like skydiving; they're expensive, spectacular, over before you know it, and if you're the one in the hot seat they deliver one hell of an adrenalin rush.

One of the nice things I'm finding about getting a bit older is that just as experiences begin to stack up, the store of 'amazing but as yet unrealised' projects also keeps growing. Mostly they lie dormant or get forgotten, and often I realise that they're actually pretty bad, but there is something reassuring about knowing that they're there. *It was never meant to last (BIG TIME LOVE)* was one of those projects that sat in my mind unfinished for quite some time, waiting for the right context in which to solidify, and in something of a cliché it woke me up in the middle of the night when it was done.

Lasting for just one minute for us here on Earth, *It was never meant to last (BIG TIME LOVE)* was a pyrotechnic display, involving a four metre high black timber structure, fuse wire, a control box, and 11 letters made out of pyrotechnic lances that spelt the words BIG TIME LOVE. Nestled amongst palm trees and next to the unfinished swimming pool in Prince Alfred Park, the text exploded into the night, its frame angled to the sky so that the light might continue out into the universe forever. As often happens with my projects, I hadn't seen the work myself before it occurred. It went off in a series of loud bangs, produced a thick cloud of smoke, and was generally more rock 'n' roll than I had anticipated. I always like it when my works catch me by surprise.

Commissioned as part of the *We Are Here* symposium celebrating Artist Run Initiatives in Australia, the work aimed to address this context, referencing the 'big time love' that goes into keeping such activities afloat and reflecting the bright burning light of passion that brings these cooperatives into being. ARIs frequently pop up and disappear, and often they are planned that way. Firstdraft, the host venue for this work, began life as a two-year project based on the activities in a communal studio, but just like the light going out into the universe forever such activities never quite go away, whether remaining in solid form as Firstdraft has managed to do 23 years after the initial 'project' period was up, or in more subtlety generative ways, fostering ongoing creative energies in the arts and wider communities.

I read once that the maximum impact any one of us can have on the universe is the cone of light that expands outwards through time and space at the speed of light from the moment we are born. Perhaps through this project I was hoping to add a small bright spot to my cone, sharing some of the love which fuels my artistic work with the universe at large and forging some kind of connection between our infinitesimally small patch of time and space and the infinite beauty and wonder of the universe. The transformative nature of light has always been a central thread in my practice, and that moment when a substance shifts from being stable matter and suddenly dissipates its energy as light and heat is for me a moment of beauty, something seemingly solid suddenly breaking apart, radiating energy out into surrounding space. The breakdown or reforming of matter, whether presented in my work physically or perceptually, is indicative of the relentless march of entropy as time ultimately

gobbles up everything in its path and shifts it from one form of existence into another, regardless of our best efforts to lock it down.

After the brief moment of ignition, BIG TIME LOVE burnt out, leaving an almost unreadable relic of the text on the skeletal black frame. Relocated into the gallery for the remainder of the exhibition, the work shifted. Spectacle always has a flip side, happiness only comes in fleeting moments, love is something not always felt, and an audience usually only sees an outcome, not often the process. BIG TIME LOVE sat ugly and large in the space, its structure cut in half to accommodate the gallery environment, with molten metal slag dripping like guano from the roughly painted timber. Existing as a document of the action, its energy depleted, the work acknowledged the inevitability of its own demise, a curious object whose purpose had been completed, enduring beyond its own once glitzy façade.

As is often the case with my works, *It was never meant to last (BIG TIME LOVE)* was engineered as an experience for those present, a work which existed for only a brief moment before shifting into another form, its light released into the universe. As fate would have it the evening in question ended up being a little overcast, but perhaps in the end this is what was needed: a little 'BIG TIME LOVE' was reflected back our way after all.

With thanks to Lou Stefanel, Brianna Munting, Georgie Meagher, Alex Clapham, NAVA, Firstdraft and the City of Sydney.

Michaela Gleave is a visual artist based in Sydney working primarily in sculpture, performance and installation.

Images on previous page, above and on right:
Michaela Gleave, It was never meant to last (BIG TIME LOVE) 2011,
One minute event: pyrotechnics, timber stand. Photography by Benjamin Wright. Images courtesy the artist and Anna Pappas Gallery.

When there is no more anxiety, there is no more hope.[1]

Biljana Jancic

Faced with the overwhelmingly unsettling nature of contemporary experience, we are conditioned to believe there are two possible responses: be stressed, shocked and scared; or otherwise, tune-out by whatever means necessary. Contemporary art, like popular media, commonly tends to offer the possibility for either alternative, a space in which one is confronted with the psychotic dimension of reality or, on the other hand, an escapist plateau of colour, movement, images, connections, words, happiness, fulfilment. Ultimately, both responses have a similar anaesthetising effect that makes reflection, criticality and poetic imagination impossible. However, as hinted in the above quote by French philosopher Paul Virilio, hope, somewhat counter-intuitively, lies in the tentative, uncertain space of anxiety.

Anxiety is uncomfortable. It is difficult. It can escalate into a disease. Questions might come up that are impossible to answer. As the Danish, nineteenth century philosopher and theologian Søren Kierkegaard suggested, the condition of anxiety is a double-edged sword; on the one side it propels the search for freedom and on the other the possibility of paralysing inaction. He compared the experience of anxiety with the dizziness produced by looking down into the abyss of being.[2] It *is* possible one will fall into this abyss; our world often feels as though it already has. However perilous this position on the precipice is, it also bears the promise of potential for self-determination.

In favour of attempting to balance on the edge, contemporary society operates through a series of knee-jerk reactions and pacifying remedies. In the end, has active engagement in art been reduced to mere death rattles? The context of contemporary art has the potential to be an important critical framework for dramatising and bringing into focus the tensions and anxieties that underscore collective experience. To answer this potential for art, artists need to resist the temptation to endlessly illustrate problems or offer yet more diversionary spectacles. Both the obscenity of transparency and the deflection offered by the spectacle offer simplistic answers. These take the place of genuine possibilities while averting difficult questions with readily readable content. If politics are still possible in art they need to come through an acknowledgement of what French philosopher Jacques Ranciere calls 'dissensus,' which is the irreconcilable difference that underpins social experience.[3] Trying to smooth out dissensus within societies creates a state of consensual apathy, leaving no room for interpretation, contradiction or paradox.

Contemporary artists invested in the possibilities of politics must accept that genuine discourse is always tense, anxious and discordant. Nonetheless these properties can simultaneously also become poetic and, dare I say, beautiful. However, simply performing democracy, inclusivity and egalitarianism in the realm of art is pacifying at least and patronising at worst. As the Australian writer and inter-disciplinary researcher Ross Gibson remarked, attempts to act parochially are misguided because it is tension that enlivens and makes a place worth living.[4] What is necessary, what drives and inspires, is learning precisely how to live with this energy. The difficult question is one of whether or not we are still able to acclimatise ourselves enough to make poetic or political use of anxiety in its present guise. If not, then perhaps our society has already tipped over the edge into Kierkegaard's abyss making reflection and negotiation impossible.

The Feeling Will Pass..., an inter-disciplinary exhibition presented at Firstdraft Gallery in September 2011, co-curated by Firstdraft co-director Georgie Meagher and Strategy and Projects Manager of the National Association for the Visual Arts Brianna Munting, collated a range of artistic perspectives that engaged an active approach to this question. The exhibition presented artists with an opportunity to experiment with warping and perverting the boundaries of the white-cube experience from within. To this end, the curators brought together practices that drew wide-ranging tangents both spatially and conceptually to a myriad of contested social models and contexts. The works were all produced with a spirit of generosity and openness. Rather than offering messages, the artists presented poetic and often ephemeral propositions that were left for the interpretive mind to respond to.

Such seemingly modest intentions offer poetic and innovative ways of thinking about common relations and are an important step in creating new ways to relate to our world. Contemporary British geographer Nigel Thrift observed that it is 'a poetics of mundane space and time which can teach us to ourselves in better ways.'[5] Offering a renewed way of thinking about the common, given or banal actually enables new ideas to generate that 'will allow peoples to survive their own environing by creating more rather than fewer worlds.'[6] In other words, what is needed to counter the homogenising tendency of capitalist oversimplification, are poetic perspectives that allow societies a chance to develop specific, nuanced positions over more prescribed modes of understanding and relating to the world and each other. Further, as Rancière suggests, politics is a practice whereby tension is enacted, thus enabling a shift in the dominant order of what is seen, spoken and done, by whom and how. Politics of aesthetics exist in the ability to make visible and heard that which is usually marginalised in favour of populist agreement.[7]

Politics and poetry emerge from unsettled, tense and anxious spaces. Hyper-anxiety just as monotonous inactivity, reduce the subject to a state of indifferent apathy. Contemporary art is at its most effective when it is able to channel existing dynamic tensions towards imagining innovative relations, propositions and possibilities.

Biljana Jancic is a Sydney based artist and writer. She recently completed her PhD from The Sydney College of the Arts.

Notes

1 Virilio, Paul (translated by Michael Taormina), *The Accident of Art*, Semiotext(e), New York, c2005, p.60.

2 Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Anxiety*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1982, p.41.

3 Jaques Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics,* translated by Gabriel Rockhill, Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006.

4 Ross Gibson, '*Attunement and Agility*,' published in Scott McQuire; Nikos Papastergiadis (ed) *Empires, ruins + networks : the transcultural agenda in art*, Carlton, Vic. : Melbourne University Press, 2005.

5 Thrift, Nigel, *Non-representational theory: space, politics, affect*, Routledge, London, 2008, p.19.

6 ibid.

7 see Jaques Ranciere, *The Politics of Aesthetics* translated by Gabriel Rockhill Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006.

I am here
Sebastian Moody

I am here 2011 is a meditation on the nature of power and responsibility.

For *I am here*, Sebastian Moody fused his ongoing investigation of market research as an image making process with his performance installation practice. Specifically designed for the opening of the exhibition 'The Feeling Will Pass...', *I am here* created a private focus group room within Firstdraft Gallery where a series of focus group sessions were conducted with gallery visitors. The room was divided in half by a temporary wall that featured a large two-way mirror.

For the first activity, participants were given a magazine and asked to select two images: one image that made them feel powerful; and another image that they felt articulated an abuse of power. Once the images were selected, individual participants shared their choices with the group. The facilitator encouraged discussion between the individuals focusing on the relationship between having power and being powerless.

For the second activity, the participants lay down on the floor to come to a state of deep rest. The facilitator talked the group through some relaxation exercises encouraging the group to get as close to an unconscious state as possible. The facilitator asked the participants to remember the first time in their life that they ever felt powerful. Pens and paper were provided to record the personal story. After the stories were collected the focus group ended.

Participants were then given the opportunity watch the next group from behind the two-way mirror. In this way, the participants moved along a hierarchy of power, from participant to hidden observer.

Sebastian Moody is a Brisbane-based artist with a diverse conceptual practice. His work often takes the form of temporary installations in public spaces.

Images above and on right: Sebastian Moody, I Am Here 2011, Installation and performance, Dimensions variable. Photo by D. Munting.

Unworkable Action
Nervous Systems

Nervous Systems is a collaboration between artists Alice Lang and Rachael Haynes which explores the possibility for personal exchange and collective production within the gallery and other social situations. For *Unworkable Action (Sydney 2011)*, a workstation was constructed within the gallery where participants could make a protest sign. Working with blank placards, cardboard, wood and pens, these signs responded to social situations and personal ire.

The instructions (appropriated from the WikiHow website) were simple, open and non-specific, so that participants could protest about any matter large or small, concrete or abstract. The work/action evolved as these placards accumulated over the duration of the exhibition. There was an element of play but also tension, as these 'signs' of protest contained within the gallery space were rendered somewhat unworkable, reflecting on the complicated nature of contemporary protest and feelings of apathy, frustration and futility.

Instructions on 'How to Protest in Six Simple Steps':

1. Sit down at the Protest Sign workstation
2. Select the materials for your sign
3. Decide what your sign will say
4. Make sure your writing is clear and legible
5. Decorate your sign
6. Attach a handle to your sign.

Rachael Haynes is a visual artist and arts writer based in Brisbane and recently completed a Doctorate of Philosophy in practice led research at the Queensland University of Technology.

Alice Lang is an Australian artist currently based in Brisbane. In 2004, Lang completed her Honours in Visual Arts at Queensland University of Technology and was awarded the Queensland Art Gallery Hobday and Hingston Bursary.

Images on right: Nervous Systems (Alice Lang and Rachael Haynes), Unworkable Action, Mixed media installation, 2011. Image courtesy of the artists.

Images above: Unworkable Action 2011, Mixed Media Installation.
Dimensions variable. Photographs by D. Munting.

Path to the Possible: critique and social agency in artist run initiatives

Hugh Nichols

In his seminal text on urbanism, *The Urban Revolution* (1970), French sociologist and Marxist, Henri Lefebvre presented urbanism as a 'policy'. Consisting of both institutional and ideological components, Lefebvre believed that thought and critique were of key importance to the development of this policy. From the point of view of a political spectrum stretching from 'right' to 'left', he asserted that critique from the right is focused on the past, frequently neo-liberal in its outlook and primarily attempting to open a path for the private interests of those who control capital. Of more interest in the current context is his view of the possibilities that critique from the left presents, as it provides a useful starting point for considering what role artist run initiatives play in developing artistic and institutional practice that activates social agency and exchange.

> *"Critique from the left...attempts to open a path to the possible, to explore and delineate a landscape that is not merely part of the 'real', the accomplished, occupied by existing social, political, and economic forces. It is a utopian critique because it steps back from the real without, however, losing sight of it."*[1]

Like Lefebvre's 'urbanism', artistic practice might be seen as a policy consisting of institutional and ideological components. Historically within the arts, artist run initiatives have been considered to be the alternative spaces in which critique is located – the left-leaning spaces that attempt to "open a path to the possible". The critique that they produce grapples with both the institutional and ideological elements of artistic practice. It is partly from within this critique that the role of the artist run initiative in activating agency rests in that they provide the thought from which strategic action and tactical response[2] are derived.

Although Lefebvre states that critique from the left is by nature utopian in outlook, he acknowledges that it is by necessity embedded in the 'real', the accomplished, occupied by existing social, political, and economic forces". Before determining what role artist run initiatives are required to play, it is necessary to understand the forces to which they are subject. It is important to note that Lefebvre refers to 'forces' as opposed to 'constraints' as this indicates their nature as both opportunities *and* challenges. For artist run initiatives what are some of the forces that make up the 'real'?

The social outlook of artist run initiatives is multifaceted and vast. However, one social and institutional force with which artist run initiatives need to contend is the trend toward exploring the ways that contemporary art and its institutions can meaningfully engage with the social spaces that surround them. This concern with engagement extends across the full spectrum of institutions involved in the arts, from large government agencies to small artist run spaces. Since the development of the artist-run model as we know it today, one way in which social agency has been activated is through public critique of topics deemed to be relevant to the culture at the time. This is manifested in exhibitions and programs that deal with the 'hard issues'

and that adopt stances that could be interpreted as controversial or beyond the capabilities of more 'institutionalised' organisations. In this respect, artist run initiatives can be viewed as similar to the scientific laboratory in that they represent a controlled environment that considers and experiments with the 'real', but still ultimately rests outside of it. While this role still rests predominately with artist run initiatives it is worthwhile considering that publicly funded and commercial galleries are able at times when the political or economic climate allows it, to also incorporate into their operations socially challenging exhibitions and programs.

A more direct engagement with this force is through the lens of collaborative practice. Community engagement is, of course, an area of *directed* high priority for institutions that rely on government bodies for significant parts of their funding. Since the general acceptance of Bourriaud's notion of 'relational aesthetics' as a legitimate practice for the contemporary artists, social engagement and collaborative practice have also been within the remit of less experimental spaces that have a greater focus on commercially viable or established practice.

Lefebvre proposes that urbanism is universal and that it encapsulates both the social relationships and contracts that exist within the urban environment as well as the physical development that occurs within it. In 2009, Sydney artists Keg de Souza and Zanny Begg initiated a multiplatform project entitled *There goes the neighbourhood*.[3] The project discussed the process of gentrification occurring within the contested landscape of Redfern, a suburb of key significance to the urban culture of Sydney. Within the expansive publication that accompanied the project, writer and researcher Ann Deslandes considered a key role of the artist to be that of reflection upon the nature of the urban environment, the artist's role within it, and from this, an attempt to gain an understanding of a "text in a context so vast and ungraspable".[4] Extrapolating from this, when individual artists gather together and form an artist run initiative, they take on the vital task of engaging with urban development from the perspective of the artist, but on institutional grounds. This 'strength in numbers' approach is arguably one of the best ways to advocate on behalf of artists in society and to negotiate the institutionalised landscape, as it attempts to harness the strategic methods of dominant institutions without compromising the ideological aims and tactical intentions of the individual artists involved.

An economic force with which artist run initiatives have contended since their inception is the commercialisation of the art object and the artistic space. Critique of this process is part of the DNA of the artist run system, and artist run initiatives partly owe their very existence to the desire to create parallel systems to those deemed insufficient or wrongly oriented toward commercial interests. The commercial gallery system, although it is often said to transpose artistic practice for capital, is a necessary and not-adversarial parallel system to independent and practice focused artist run initiatives, which are seen as spaces independent of commercial concerns. Much like the laboratory, this independence is viewed as being of huge importance to their role as critical institutions engaging social and artistic agency.

Of course, all of the above relate to what is perhaps the most relevant force to consider in any discussion of the role of artist run initiatives; institutionalisation. In his essay *Institutionalisation for All*,[5] Dave Beech states that the reason for the disquiet this process inspires is partially due to a misreading of the avante garde as having no content of its own other than the negation of the dominant culture. Beech goes on to cite the death of the author, the attack on the primacy of the visual and the dematerialisation of the art object as examples of content of concern to the avant garde artist. But what might be of concern to artist run initiatives? While the negation of dominant cultures is at the core of their historical role, they also have their own critical content from which to draw, such as, in the case of *The Feeling Will Pass..., the* exploration of multidisciplinary, cross-social and collaborative processes and the engagement of commerce. Michaela Gleave's multidisciplinary practice utilises temporal processes to comment on the physicality of how we engage with the processes that occur in the world around us. Hossein Ghaemi's similarly varied practice includes collaborative live art elements. Sebastian Moody works with public and site-specific art, collaborative performance and installation, while Carl Scrase utilises the viral capabilities of the internet to undertake a collaborative and similarly publicly oriented practice. Blood & Thunder Publishing and Cake Industries likewise engage with these ideas through visualisation and documentation of social and artistic practice within the context of commerce and production. Above all, however, what unites the practices included in the *The Feeling Will Pass...* is that each of them contains elements that are part of an increasingly important aspect of contemporary artistic practice the interventions into public and institutionalised space. They employ tactical engagement strategies with the institutionalised 'real', in real time and on its home turf.

With this brief consideration of the forces that direct the ability of artist run initiatives to develop their utopian critiques, it might be, as Dave Beech claims, "no great shame that [such practices] get taken up by art's institutions,".[6] On the one hand, it is difficult to see why the process of interaction across institutional boundaries could result in anything other than a more meaningful social role for artists and artist run initiatives. On the other, if part of an artist run initiative's role in activating social and artistic agency is derived from their institutional and ideological independence, how will they negotiate the institutionalised landscape into the future? While there are no easy answers to these questions, if critique is at the heart of an artist run initiatives function, then it is not just the outcome that is important, but also the process.

Hugh Nichols was the successful participant in the 2011 Firstdraft Emerging Writers Program.

Notes

1 Lefebvre, H 1970, *The Urban Revolution,* 2003, University of Minnesota Press, viewed 17 September 2011, http://books.google.com/books/about/The_urban_revolution.html?id=5_dbeJX3EPsC

2 I refer here to de Certeau's conceptionthe idea of a 'strategy' as a rationalised action taking place in institutionalised space, and 'tactic' as momentary and opportunistic responses to the 'real' occurring within more marginalised spaces., as outlined by de Certeau.

3 *You Are Here*, 2009, viewed 18 September 2011, http://www.theregoestheneighbourhood.org/index.htm

4 Lefebvre, H 1970, *The Urban Revolution,* 2003, University of Minnesota Press, viewed 17 September 2011, http://books.google.com/books/about/The_urban_revolution.html?id=5_dbeJX3EPsC

5 Beech, D 2006, 'Institutionalisation for All', *Art Monthly,* 294, viewed 19 September 2011, http://www.artmonthly.co.uk/magazine/site/article/institutionalisation-for-all-by-dave-beech-march-2006/

6 ibid.

Experiment 03: Viral Poster Project

S.E.R.I. (Carl Scrase)

"We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if mankind is to survive." – Albert Einstein

Increasingly frustrated with the semantics of the label 'artist' and the conceptual boundaries of aiming to make 'Art', Carl Scrase reformed his personal creative practice into an organisation, the Social Engineering Research Initiative (S.E.R.I.)

S.E.R.I. will build upon the Beuysian concept of 'social sculpture', creating far-reaching positive systemic change, or 'social engineering'. S.E.R.I. is founded on the belief that new tools such as the World Wide Web can be used to enable humanity to reach a more empathic level of awareness.

S.E.R.I. officially launched 'Experiment 03: Viral Poster Project' as part of *The Feeling Will Pass...* The 'Viral Poster Project' encourages people to paste up posters around their environment with the question 'Is our empathy on the rise?' printed on them, wait a couple of weeks then take photos of the responses and upload them to the website or the Facebook page.

At last check, the You Tube instructional video had over 2,500 views.

www.seri.net.au

Carl Scrase is a creator, curator, arts worker and writer. He co-founded Oprojects Artist Run Space in 2008, which specialised in cross art-form collaboration and communication. In 2010 he co-founded S.E.R.I. and the Wemakeus Collective.

Image on right: Carl Scrase, Experimental 03, Viral poster project, 2011.
Image courtesy the artist.

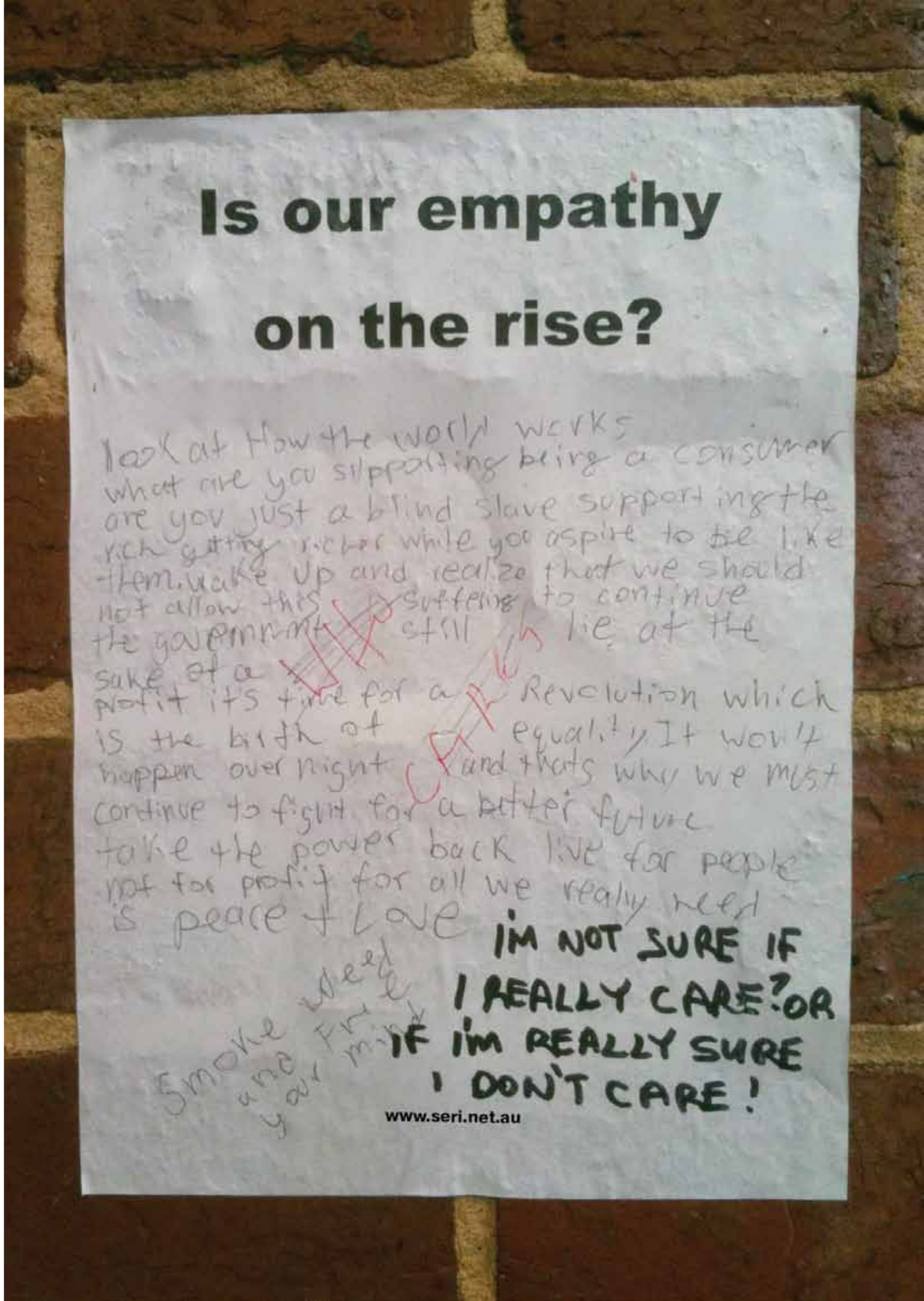


Image above: Carl Scrase, Experimental 03, Viral poster project, 2011.
Photograph by D. Munting.

WAH Symposium

Presentations & Reflections

Writers:

Georgie Meagher
& Brianna Munting
Phip Murray
Anneke Jaspers
Lisa Havilah
Claire Mooney
Brigid Noone
Scot Cotterell
Lionel Bawden
Sarah Rodigari
Tamara Winikoff

We Are Here
Welcome by Kathy Keele

Artist run initiatives, in all of their forms, are integral to the development of artists' careers and to the vitality of our arts sector and the communities in which they exist. They offer a space in which ambitious, experimental and sometimes controversial artworks can be both created and experienced. Many of our contemporary visual arts leaders today have grown from the ARI network. Many return.

The diversity and breadth of ARIs make them difficult to pin down in a neat definition. However, this elusiveness speaks to their beauty and to their strength. It means they can't be institutionalised or controlled. It means that they are unpredictable. It gives them the flexibility to produce work in new ways and to test the boundaries of the creative process.

It's for this reason that the Australia Council's Visual Arts Board has supported Artist Run Initiatives for over two decades. ARIs have become a very significant contributor to Australia's arts ecology.

If we recognise something of value in the network of ARIs across this country, it's important to have a conversation about where ARIs are now, where they've come from, where they are going and, most importantly, where we *want* them to go. The inaugural We Are Here forum was groundbreaking in being the first time this conversation has occurred on a large national scale. It also offered an opportunity to exchange ideas, stimulate innovation and creativity, and forge new collaborations.

With the ideas and events from We Are Here now captured in this publication, this conversation can continue.

I congratulate everyone involved in this event and wish you all the very best for your future endeavours.

Kathy Keele is the Chief Executive Officer of The Australia Council for the Arts.

We were there. Now what next?
Georgie Meagher & Brianna Munting

The title *We Are Here* evokes a number of temporal threads, the most palpable being a sense of the constant present: persistent change eternally recreating an equilibrium of the 'now'. It is in this spirit that we began to consider the present, past and future of artist-led culture in Australia. This 'now' is, of course, impossible to accurately document in perpetuity, and so we can only hope to capture a blurry snapshot of this nebulous moment and, to stretch the photographic metaphor, encourage more to be taken.

Although the event itself is over, we hope *WAH* might be considered an unfinished discussion that can be used as a point of reference for a continuing investigation into the future possibilities of artist spaces and projects as agents for change and as diverse as they are multiple in models, visions and histories. We hoped, perhaps somewhat idealistically, to be able to contribute to a collective imagining that celebrates these pluralities, champions independence, and simultaneously finds strategies to strengthen the sector collectively.

In approaching this idea of collectivity a key point of contestation - one that is addressed in the writing of a number of contributors to this publication - is the continued use of the Artist-Run-Initiative (ARI) label and the definition of what an ARI might be. This term continues to be called into question on a number of levels and presents both semantic and practical difficulties both to those who choose to use it and those who eschew it. It is critical to acknowledge the complexities of nomenclature that emerge through the diverse vocabularies of writers and artists who have contributed to this publication.

> "*Definitional activities are fictionalising processes, however much they sound like rational categorisation.*"[1]

The term 'ARI' certainly has its problems, not least of which are its associations with emerging artists, white cube gallery spaces and the attendant assumption that they function as little more than a step between art school and institutional or commercial 'success'. This is not even considering this terminology as institutionally sanctioned (whether born from government policy makers or adopted by them). The question remains, however, do we abandon the term? And if we do, do we do so in favour of a single other or a multiplicity of alternatives? Denomination presents a significant tension in being communicatively functional and perhaps even necessary for effective networking and advocacy, whilst at the same time increasing susceptibility to the development of another similarly narrow narrative thread which undermines the diversity and independence of these spaces.

Entwined with the politics and problematics of how these projects might be named is where they are subsequently located in the ecology of contemporary art. Professionalism, institutionalisation and independence were three areas of fierce inquisition through the discussions. Professionalism was once posited as incongruous with independence and institutionalisation feared as an ever-impending threat. Although these terms will be deconstructed further

through the writing in this publication, we can't help but editorialise and argue that despite problems of definition, it seems self-defeating to argue against professionalism point-blank. Articulated as a contraction of artists' ability to operate outside of 'mainstream' channels in the arts ecology, nevertheless, we might propose professionalism as something artists can choose to employ as a means of exerting their rights and broadening their capacities. Professionalism need not be a dirty word! Although it might not be appropriate for every project, it can be a point of leverage, empowerment and advantage. Ultimately it seems that any unison approach is worth questioning. As artist-led projects emerge from various social, political, cultural and geographic contexts, agendas and operating models develop to match.

Space was a reoccurring concern in terms of both practical and conceptual issues. Discussion centred on the burden of compliance, regulations and legitimacy, raising questions about the feasibility of maintaining independence and the relationship between forms of organisation, artistic practices and geographic location. Representatives from artist-run spaces in regional Australia also illuminated the significant and varied needs of artists in these areas.

From a propositional space inhabited by a multiplicity of perspectives on artist self-organisation, one outcome is certain: artists are charged with both the responsibility and the inevitability of their invention of the future of Australian contemporary art. It could be the gravity of this point - simultaneously self-evident and contended by those interrogating the agendas of governments and cultural institutions - that fuels such fierce debate around issues close to the heart of individuals who participate in artist-led culture in Australia.

We were there. This is what we heard.

Notes

1 From Susan Stanford Friedman, *MODERNISM / modernity* Volume Eight, Number Three, pp.493–513. 2001 The John Hopkins University Press.

'There is too much niceness.'

Phip Murray

This statement – 'There is too much niceness' – stuck out at me when I read the notes scribed during the WAH forum on Arts Criticism. The notes did not record who said it, but it was certainly a theme that emerged out of the discussions that day. I was intrigued by the general consensus that, although arts criticism was felt to be alive and well, it was characterised by a bit too much niceness. Participants broadly felt that arts writers and critics erred too much on the side of support and collegiality. This support was greatly appreciated by the group, which, it should be noted, included a high percentage of artists. Nevertheless, they seemed to be saying en masse: "Don't patronize us! Let's have a proper discussion about art, even if that means derogatory comments might be made about my exhibition." I was struck by this real desire for honest commentary about the art presented in the artist-run and independent sectors. The participants surrounding me were notable for the seriousness and intelligence they brought to their professions and, not least of all, their bravery in the face of a potentially bad review.

The impulse to support contemporary art (and its often lowly-remunerated participants) is understandable in a country in which contemporary art is still little understood and often maligned. Many of the participants agreed that Australian culture was still beset by a pervasive strain of anti-intellectualism. Despite this, participants were adamant that this should not result in a bolstering of the arts ecology through a tendency to print praise and shy away from criticism (and condemnation). The group thought that artists and their critics should continue to keep calm and carry on, regardless of mainstream Australia's lack of interest. There was a wonderful sense of ambition and toughness in this crowd.

There was a great interest amongst the group in the changing nature of arts criticism. There was recognition that within mainstream outlets, most particularly the daily newspapers, column space devoted to real arts commentary (and not capsule reviewing or 'the arts as entertainment') was dwindling. However there was great interest in the new forms of arts criticism that were emerging through the diversification of media. This includes, most notably, the Internet, but it also includes the increased proliferation of independent presses and publishing houses. There was excitement, in particular, about the new possibilities of online media, such as the ability to include rich media content (such as video and sound) and the relative cheapness of online publishing, which is a key factor in the viability of arts criticism within the artist-run sphere.

There was a bit of argy-bargy over whether the standards in online media were lower. Some felt that print media still held the monopoly on quality writing. Others, however, strenuously denied this, believing that bad (and good) writing could happen anywhere. There was a sense that in the incredible fragmentation of media and criticism that has occurred over the past few decades, you needed to know where to look to find the good stuff. Part of the necessary skill set related to understanding the new terrain of arts criticism. Also discussed was the need to find ways to support new forms of art writing and criticism outside of the mainstream. There was a sense that good criticism was critically engaged in contemporary art practice within both an Australian, but also a broader international context.

An interesting discussion within the group occurred around the demise of the 'authorial voice'. This was recognition that arts criticism was changing; that gravitas was no longer invested in Greenberg-style 'art critics' who wrote with an authoritative voice and who were fuelled by a belief that they were well placed to judge art. Now, critics were seen to occupy a range of positions. This, not unsurprisingly, was a quality cherished by a bunch of creative people who have aligned themselves with the independent arts sector. There was excitement about the diversification of media and the diversification of speaking positions. Contemporary arts criticism is a complex terrain with a vast array of outlets and agendas, and this group liked it that way. People were interested in the possibilities being opened up, in new voices being heard alongside older ones, and in the expanded practices of art writing and art criticism.

Another line from the transcription that stuck out to me was this: "One of the challenges of good art criticism is to be constructive." I like this line. It also seems to sum up the attitude of those sitting around me. Of course there are also attendant questions like 'What is constructive?' and 'What is good arts criticism?' but nevertheless it articulates the ambitions of the forum participants. Those seated around me were fuelled by a sense of diligence and ambition. They desired much for themselves and for Australian arts culture. They wanted to make great things and build a culture of excellence in the arts, and there was acknowledgement that feedback and critique were essential components of this process.

Like all panels we had barely enough time to discuss the complexities of this intricate subject but, nonetheless, I felt we articulated a sophisticated and very progressive response to the future of arts criticism (there was no sitting around bemoaning the 'death of' anything here). It was a great pleasure to facilitate this conversation, which included very thoughtful and intelligent contributions from a diverse range of practitioners including both artists and writers (and very often a hybrid of both). This was a group not shying away from robust critical discussion. They definitely wrote for love and not fear. If the future of arts criticism is up to such a group, I feel assured it's in safe (but also robustly critical) hands.

Phip Murray is a Melbourne-based artist and writer and the Director of West Space, an artist-led organisation located in Melbourne.

Curators: gatekeepers or co-catalysts?

Anneke Jaspers

I would like to reflect on two streams of thought that energised the dialogue during the *We Are Here* roundtable session, which was loosely guided by the provocation 'Do Curators Exist?'

The first of these was around the spectrum of activity that comprises organising, programming and curating, and the extent to which equivalencies can be drawn between these undertakings. Clearly, they are not always discrete, and most curators – particularly in the Australian context, where a culture of freelance curating is fairly contained – are involved in administrative and managerial processes in an organisational context. Within this set of circumstances, ambiguity around what might be designated as 'curatorial' is underscored by the degree to which, in the realm of contemporary art, the activity of curating has radically expanded in recent decades to include a whole range of activities that were previously the domain of others.

These days, curators are not simply custodians who collect, care for and administer the display of objects after the fact of their being made, and with respect to the value and meaning already accrued to them by history. They are often fully embedded in the production and realisation of work, as instigators and intermediaries, and explicitly involved in its critical framing and evaluation. They moderate between artworks and audiences, as well as between artists and a whole range of project stakeholders, from sponsors and marketing staff to educators and technicians. In addition, they bring their own authorial agenda to the task of presenting exhibitions, which is often couched within a broader array of ongoing interpretive activities.

Addressing the impact of this authorial agenda, a commentary has been gathering momentum that frames curators as original creators in their own right, as 'producers', so to speak.[1] On the one hand, this acknowledges the increasing centrality of the curator in the practice of exhibition making. On the other, it accounts for the apparent blurring between the roles of curator and artist that goes hand-in-hand with the division of labour and collaborative technical relations that underpin most contemporary art making. Critics characterise this notion of curators-as-producers as mistakenly equating curatorial power with artistic authorship; an attempt to usurp the sovereign claim of artists as *the* producers within the sphere of art.[2]

Without wanting to get mired in the complexities of these opposing positions, I mention this debate because it was on my mind before the *We Are Here* roundtable. I put it to the group: are curators creative producers in their own right? No-one objected to the idea; there was a general consensus in favour. Although there were many artists present, none saw this as generating a potential surplus of creative ego, or a dangerous exaggeration of the role of curators whose activity is, after all, entirely reliant on the output of artists. Later on in the discussion it became apparent that many of the participants involved in organising and programming within an ARI context identify these activities as curating.

In my mind, these two positions are at odds, or at least sit together somewhat uncomfortably, in that one embraces an expanded critical and creative agency for curators, and the other sees their role as readily subsumed within the task of selecting and the logistics of implementation. In the expansive gap between, the prospect of contestation between multiple, complex creative agendas, the constructive potential of this process lingers unacknowledged and most likely under-explored in practice.

Interestingly, this intersects with the other key thrust of the discussion: how the practice of curating is perceived and valued by participants in the ARI sector. Summed up in a word, one participant pinned curators as 'gatekeepers', pointing to how curators have become increasingly imbricated in the processes that confer value on certain practices over others and enable participation in different aspects of the art world. Another participant labelled curators more generously as 'co-catalysts', foregrounding instead the co-operative, even collaborative, spirit that underscores many artist-curator exchanges and the fruitful artistic outcomes that can be fostered through investment in shared objectives.

In as much as they are necessarily reductive, these outlooks are also not mutually exclusive. While certain power hierarchies inform the participation of curators in the sector at large (and it is important to recognise and deal with these reflexively), the potential for curators to be constructively embedded in the initiation and development of art exists simultaneously. My abiding feeling following the session, and now in hindsight, is that it is incumbent on ARIs to foster a deep consideration of the knotty intersections between such seemingly discordant perspectives as these, in order to fully grapple with and interrogate curating as a discipline. ARIs are uniquely placed to do this; to critique and destabilise dominant models of curatorship and foster new approaches, being, as they are, more nimble and more flexible than established institutions.

Anneke Jaspers is the Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of NSW and a writer for arts publications nationally.

Notes

1 The Manifesta Journal has been influential in articulating this idea. See specifically 'Issue 5: *Artist & Curator*' and 'Issue 10: *The Curator As Producer*', (Manifesta Foundation Amsterdam, The Netherlands and Silvana Editoriale Spa, Milano, Italy).

2 As vigorously argued, for instance, by Anton Vidokle in his article '*Art Without Artists*', e-flux journal #16, May 2010, accessible at http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/136

Community Engaged Practice – An emerging issue for Australian ARIs

Lisa Havilah

Community engagement is a term that is fluid in both definition and application. It is also a term that continues to shift as artists and arts institutions continue to develop new models of working with and responding to the communities that surround them.

Over the last ten years there has been a continual rise in social engaged practices in the development of work. Collaboration, exchange, dialogue and reciprocity have all become important values in the contemporary art world, whether in relation to the process of making art or making exhibitions. Within ARIs the definition of community becomes even more complex as an ARI or a network of ARIs can be defined as communities unto themselves.

ARIs play an important role in Australia in questioning the definitions of and experimenting with the processes around community engagement. Community engaged practice may include artists working directly with sections of the community in a process based way to inform the development of an artwork, or could also be an ARI actively engaging the community to provide context for the development of a program that emerges from the location in which the ARI is situated.

To undertake artist led community engagement projects and programs is a process driven costly investment in both time and resources. This becomes a challenge for the ARI model, which is primarily not resourced to produce works and programs that are resource heavy. This lack of resources then comes back to the artist directly to implement, which can lead to engagement process being compromised.

Another primary challenge that is faced by the ARIs in relation to community engagement is their locations. In Australia and internationally ARIs are primarily located in the middle of cities in buildings that are about to or have the potential to become redeveloped. These buildings are in areas that are on the precipice of becoming gentrified. As a result of this economic requirement to be in buildings don't have commercial rental levels attached to them there are limited communities physically surrounding ARIs which makes it hard for the ARI to develop context within their projects and programs.

There are examples of significant shifts occurring in the establishment of ARIs within different contexts and with different social and cultural agendas. A strong example of this is the establishment of Sydney ARI *Firstdraft Depot* in Woolloomooloo, a socially diverse community within inner city Sydney. *Firstdraft Depot* specifically state the aims of their programming at the *Depot* to; Develop the arts and cultural life of Woolloomooloo through reflecting the diverse fabric of the community; Connect community members across generations, art forms and socio economic groups. This clear message from *Firstdraft Depot* signifies a shift in programming and has resulted in an increasingly diverse community engaged projects.

The other challenge that ARIs face in the establishment of diverse community engagement programs is the pathway that artists and artsworkers take into the national ARI network. The primary pathway in Australia is through tertiary education. Over the last ten years the span and diversity of tertiary arts education has continued to decrease. Some major art schools in Universities outside of metropolitan city centre's have shut down. Alongside this the costs associated with tertiary education continues to increase. The combination of these two factors has resulted in art schools becoming less accessible to culturally and socially diverse communities, which in turn impacts on ARIs ability to have diversity within their programming.

The term 'community' or 'communities' often has the effect of homogenising the complexity of individuals and groups. It is important that in contemporary artistic practice that we continue to explore different ideas of community not just those linked by geography or cultural background. The ARI community in Australia is a generous one which invests significant self generated resources into emerging practices. The continued turn towards the social, the diverse and the culturally engaged will continue to demand more from ARIs, more risk and more complex partnerships with Government and with communities.
I look forward to seeing how ARIs in Australia continue to respond.

Lisa Havilah is a director and curator specialising in contemporary art projects focused on community engagement. She is currently the Director of CarriageWorks.

Children, Creativity, Education & ARIs: Starting Young, Building Audiences

Claire Mooney

Introduction

The roundtable 'Starting Young. Building Audiences' was held on the Saturday afternoon of the WAH Symposium. We had just been fed, so any residual hangover from the night before had been well bolstered by infusions of delicious falafel and greek salad.

This particular roundtable brought together a motley bunch. There were people from established institutions who had worked on comprehensive art education programs such as MCA's program 'Generation Next'; people from organisations who had taken a stab at different forms of education programming and found it often distracted from their core priorities; artists fresh out of university and somewhat disillusioned about the gap between what their education provided and what they found in real-life practice; and people from regional ARIs who were keen to discuss issues surrounding the building of audiences from scratch in more isolated areas.

The following are some of the main threads of conversation that arose, a few brief reflections and my own commentary.

ARIs as educators about art; "Why do we want kids in the space anyway?"

We didn't lead with this comment, but it's a nice, controversial place to start. It was actually thrown into the mix in a slightly tongue-in-cheek manner (I think), yet it resonated with many of the other observations and experiences of the group. Why indeed?

Do ARIs need to be the ones to get art out to the students? Is it necessary to make ARIs 'kid friendly'? Would the energy and time (both valuable, precious and limited resources) that may go into forging relationships with teachers, schools and students, and catering for education outcomes detract from what the ARI is about? Is it worth it?

This 'why' seems to be an important point for ARIs to consider when faced with difficult decisions about just how much they can possibly do with their resources. As one participant pointed out, if ARIs are going to have an education program they should probably know clearly what their motivations for having it are and how it fits with their ethos. Given this, if ARIs are interested in developing education programs there are also further things to consider, including: the short turn-around time of exhibitions and the impact this has on teachers planning visits; the demands of building a program that meets both artistic and curriculum needs; the logistics of forming relationships with teachers and getting schools and students in the space. Alternatives to conventional exhibition programs were discussed. These included providing programs directed at teachers and educators, or considering an ARI-based

program where ARIs themselves (as galleries, organisations and/or networks) would be the focus.

Some of the positives of developing education programs were also discussed, such as the opportunity to influence, inspire and engage a fresh new generation, building support within the general community for art and ARIs and the chance for both ARIs and artists to reach (or create) a young, art-friendly demographic.

Can we have some help with that?

In the context of developing education programs, and also ever present within all other threads of conversation was the issue of resources and support. (We want more!) Oh, and time. Did I mention time?

Collectively, the roundtable put together a brief wish list for ARIs. Some of the items discussed included:

- Outsourcing education programs to a more centralised organisation (or person) where one full-time education officer could work with multiple ARIs;
- Having public resources, templates and models as a way for ARIs to easily develop new programs without having to reinvent the wheel (on this note, NAVA is setting up a website to address this need as we speak. Check it out: ARIna.org.au);
- More professional development opportunities (for ARIs, teachers, artists) especially in regional areas;
- More communication, talking, sharing, networking, associating, connecting, linking, helping between communities and ARIs.

And this just scrapes the surface...May we have some, please?

ARIs as educators about the arts sector

Another topic broached by the group was the feeling that universities did not realistically address issues of professional practice for artists, and that ARIs could fill this gap (or were filling this gap for a select few) and act in a supportive role, educating young artists on the dynamics of the arts sector and the requirements of them as artists.

I might add that ARIs are often viewed in these terms anyway, and the assumption that ARIs are incubators, or that they are 'stepping-stones' between university and the 'grown-up' art world tends to be more than a little contentious and can bring on fisticuffs and eye-poking in some circles. However, it is hard to argue against the fact that ARIs generally do provide a DIY place where artists, curators, arts administrators and writers can practice independently and develop skills.

This also raised questions about existing relationships between universities and the ARI sector. The general feeling was that it would be positive to encourage more communication and collaboration between the two. We didn't decide who would do this. With young artists representing a significant percentage of exhibitors, audiences and initiators for ARIs, the university is obviously a rich site for fostering productive relationships, increasing the sharing of knowledge and making connections.

Pathways of communication and sharing

Appropriately enough, considering the context of the discussion (WAH), a point that kept being made during the roundtable (and one that has popped up repeatedly in this report) was about the importance of communication, dialogue, networking and connectivity.

With a number of representatives from regional ARIs, one of which had just started up, one of the key issues discussed was that of being connected, being visible, getting people in the space and getting much needed support. These are ongoing issues of critical importance to ARIs, both young and old.

In this respect, the internet, particularly social media, was continually mentioned and has become for many a powerful (and cheap!) strategy for communicating, promoting and networking. Yet visibility can still be limited, or it can be that a saturated presence on the internet may promote a broader audience, but not necessarily a more engaged audience. In this respect, an internet presence that plugs into local positioning such as 'What's On' phone apps or through registering with a centralised portal website like crawl.net.au can reach a more receptive audience in their darkest time of gallery need.

Ultimately, whether ARIs choose to tread the path of traditional education programs or not, the question of how an organisation decides to engage with its audience is an issue, to be solved through either serendipity or strategy.

Art needs to be seen, heard, felt and shared for it to exist, and ARIs are one of the crucial interfaces in the sector through which this can happen. The manner in which they engage with the world becomes a large factor in their identity as an art organisation and affects the way in which we can see the artistic experiences they help create for us.

Claire Mooney completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours) at RMIT, a Master of Visual Art at the Victorian College of the Arts and a Postgraduate Diploma of Education at Melbourne University.

Space/Not space

Brigid Noone

The roundtable 'Space/Not space' generated a multifaceted and dynamic conversation around the challenges and opportunities facing Artist Run Initiatives (ARIs) at this time. Represented in the discussion were both ARIs that have a need or want for a defined physical space and ARIs and projects that are nomadic by nature (i.e. web based or site specific) and thus neither want nor need a permanent physical location. While this could easily have polarised the discussion, in practice the fact that each of these categories raises its own perspective lent the conversation a circular nature, with different concerns weaving in and out to create a more complete picture. In this paper I will attempt to capture not just the intricacies of both angles, but also how they come together.

After introductions and some background on the discussion topic, we launched head-on into the question 'Is having a physical location important?'. What quickly became apparent is that the answer to this question is not fixed, and relates directly to the needs and vision of the individual ARI or project. The diversity of individuals and projects represented in the discussion brought home the reasons why it is important to embrace the desire and necessity for ARIs and individual artists to take up space on their own terms, and to investigate what this means in practice for creative projects. This is particularly vital in the context of any assessment of the financial obstacles facing ARIs wanting to occupy space in the present 'economic rationalist' recession economy.

As an ARI or project grows as an organisation, one choice facing it is whether or not to build permanence; and an idea that arose in the course of the discussion was that it would be useful to build a national resource dedicated to mapping different permanence models in ARIs, as this would make it easier to learn from past experience and diverse possibilities. It was also reinforced that dealing with impermanence is of equal importance and can be seen as a strength, as all art to some degree plays with (im)permanence. The diversity that exists in the form taken by Australian ARIs reflects the need for groups to find their own position between permanence and impermanence that is appropriate to their specific objectives and location. It was recognised that creating models that intrinsically include sustainable permanence can be challenging, particularly when national and local funding categories often don't cover costs like rent. Alternative models have been investigated: Queen Street Studios has formed a partnership with a development company, while groups like the Red Rattler use a volunteer and financial commitment structure to maintain their independence.

Considering financial obstacles brought up further questions about cultural hierarchies of space, principally 'who can afford to occupy space in a capitalist, so-called free state?'. In light of this, being open to forming new partnerships on an individual basis was a topic for discussion. It was raised that dealing with councils or development companies doesn't have to be 'selling out', as arts activities brings cultural capital that is of value to these groups, and so artists and ARIs have a position and worth to negotiate from. With well informed communication, an arrangement can be reached that benefits everyone. There was some further discussion centreing on the potential benefits and pitfalls of artists and ARIs becoming more professional and entrepreneurial in this climate: is this a good or bad thing? Issued raised included awareness of liability and insurance, and the passive attitude of 'ignorance is bliss' (especially with regard to the fear of OH&S).

This lead the discussion into the issues that can arise from doing everything 'above-board', and it was acknowledged that a lot of projects develop in an underground culture driven by a more fluid needs-based user-directed creative atmosphere. The models of Renew Newcastle and Renew Australia were discussed as successful examples of an alternative approach for getting access to unused space. Renew is a model that is being developed to arm local communities with a streamlined and coherent approach to the challenges of gaining access to spaces, in response to the way that ARIs and projects all over Australia are effected by location-specific usages of space. There was a request from the roundtable for templates that might help individuals to successfully approach property owners, and some concerns were raised about how this model can be adapted by councils or private companies.

Over the course of the weekend there were many exciting non-site-specific projects mentioned, including Aphids and Field Theory, as well as projects represented in the roundtable such as Accidently Kelly Street and The WIRED Lab. These illustrated that there can be significant benefits gained by resisting institutionalisation and maintaining creative autonomy in developing ARIs and projects that are not dependent on a regular or permanent physical space.

Accidently Kelly Street, based in Brisbane, is a great example of this ability to create opportunities from passion and freedom. Actively choosing to move away from the white cube context, this group of artists initially used their own home environment (rent was a cost already covered so they decided to utilize it to its fullest!). They now often work off-site, making the most of the freedom afforded by renting hotel rooms, and the context in which they operate structures their ARI. Not having a fixed space can produce a different culture of access for artists. When building an audience, spaces can close, but this way, building a community of connection moves beyond having a physical location. Engaging the public can shape the work differently than it would in gallery projects, as the work has to engage with the notion of audience in an active way; one that consciously pushes these boundaries and contributes to a growing public awareness through its occupation of cultural space.

By the end of the weekend, the group came to some conclusions and raised some important questions. Not-space is not necessarily easier, it's just different problems that can arise. Unconventional spaces, satellite projects, and site-specific projects can generate logistic complexities, and it's important to be well informed when dealing with staffing, production, resources and insurance. Grass roots and the risk-taking fostered by the underground have their advantages, but institutions can help provide resources. Partnerships between grass roots organisations and institutions can work well. Active locations like Sydney can be a double-edged sword; but wherever we are; the way corporatism is feeding artist spaces has an impact, and in all locations we need to be equipped to ride the gentrification cycle. How do artists and ARIs remain flexible enough to make the most of new opportunities while building an audience and pathways for sustainability? As always, artists and creative people need to invent and adapt while maintaining their creative vision and integrity. Some people will always want to work within 'four walls', so how can we keep adapting our skills to take up cultural space while also embracing new models that move outside of the potentially stifling commitments that come with paying rent?

What was clearest from this roundtable discussion was that there will never be one ideal model to suit all artists and places, that ARIs will have complex and varying visions and needs, and that this should be embraced for the strength that it has.

Brigid Noone is currently an Adelaide based independent artist and curator.

The Subjectivity of Success
Scot Cotterell

How do we measure the success of an ARI? Is longevity a measure of success? Are all long-running ARI's institutionalised? When, if ever does the ARI term begin to be questioned?

These were the massive questions I was faced with working through as the facilitator of this roundtable. I definitely did not know the answers to these questions, and was as interested as any panel member in the many and varied responses that I imagined to these questions.

I had a gut feeling that success, and the way we were using this term had a janus-faced nature to it - success in the subjective, collective sense when a group of people band together to realise a common goal; and 'success' as a category, field or column that can be measured, reported against and evidenced to our all important stakeholders, be it funding bodies, peers, landlords, councils or the police who come to question an impromptu evening screening of sensitive video material.

The multi-faceted nature of the term, the combined experience of the roundtable participants and the breadth of different viewpoints and models made for a lively discussion. One sticking point or recurrent theme throughout the conference - that of defining the limits and boundaries of ARIs both as a term and as a way of defining their roles - came up early in our roundtable. The group quickly came to the consensus that ARIs' roles and definitions had regional nuances that greatly affected the make up, constitutions, aims and goals of the organisations, and that really defining such a thing was an exercise in futility.

We quickly progressed to a discussion about organisational structures that could foster and sustain longevity, sustainability and dynamism.
The complexities of our roles as board members, directors, funding applicants and artsworkers rose to the surface during this discussion and it quickly became apparent that logistics - i.e. the on the ground, day-to-day running, programming and maintenance of a space, a program, an organisation usually in conjunction with one's own art practice - was an incredibly tentacled juggle for most of us. Our resources, skills and time are stretched to the limit and our art practice is peppered, informed and in many ways strengthened through the innumerable skills we glean along the way.

We deemed it beneficial, if not crucial to have a range of board members with an array of complimentary skills and experiences. We need to stagger the outgoings and incomings of members, especially in the roles of chair, finance and public officer, to both aid the ongoing fluid running of our organisations but also to hand on the learned and lived experience that comes through serving as a member of an ARI. We deemed that a certain formality to the proceedings of meetings, programming and collective decision making in our organisations was of benefit to both the organisation and its stakeholders.

It is a complex balancing act that seemed almost universally shared amongst the participants which sets the need for forward thinking, driven and pro-active growth, audience development and programming initiatives alongside the often burning need for self-reflexivity, checkpoints against which we can continually re-assess our roles, strengths and weaknesses in a positive and constructive manner. All of these things need to occur at the blinding pace often of one year funding and programming turnarounds and acquittals from multiple funding bodies requiring different information, alongside rental property price rises, insurance, unexpected costs and red tape.

Suggestions made for how these often oppositional approaches can be catered for and fostered were the development of committees, for instance a management committee and a programming committee. While it's good on paper, a dedicated team still required the time, foresight and energy to set-up and maintain this model. With time, foresight and energy often at the maximum threshold from the outset, this can be a difficult task. This led onto a discussion regarding the operating principles of our spaces. Again both sides of the coin were shown. A space-less pop-up ARI can exhibit fluidly, intermittently and sporadically; it can capitalise on sudden opportunities while also hibernating in periods of need. A physically grounded space, while having to deal with rental overheads, continuous management and logistics can program in advance, make longer running strategic moves, forge mutually beneficial relationships with other spaces in order to share resources and in some ways has a 'home' to go back to (unless the landlords decide otherwise).

After throwing around many ideas regarding the possible models, approaches and missions of our organisations we seemed to return to the benefits for all involved in these tenuous and often difficult projects we had all embarked upon. We deemed it important to actively promote ourselves, not just our organisations but also the individual members whose expertise and energy made these remarkable little cultural hotspots a possibility. That success could be directly evidenced through the profile and excellence of the work of our members, exhibiting artists and peers was strongly agreed.

As expected, we reached no solid resolution but had an amazing and lively discussion along the way. In the words of one participant staring back at me from my typed notes "Artists can be bureaucratic *and* creative."

Scot Cotterell is an inter-disciplinary artist concerned with responses to technology and media.

ARIs and Career Trajectories in the Arts

Lionel Bawden

There is a passion and energy common to most artists who donate their time to ARIs and whilst these roles are typically unpaid and require many hours a week, alongside studio practice and paid work, the rewards of involvement are rich and diverse. The reward is the engagement itself, helping to make things happen and being part of a dialogue around contemporary and experimental practice. Artists typically arrive with a range of skills, which endlessly expand through the Do It Yourself, "lets make it happen" approach that demands constant on the spot learning. Artists' engagement with other artists is the core of the A.R.I. experience - lending a hand, knowledge sharing, discussing ideas and process all over a few drinks and deep into the night.

ARIs afford a dynamism quite different from commercial galleries or institutions and many artists actively choose this broad ever shifting arena of Artist Run Initiatives as a context to remain engaged with for many years, (regardless of their interest in/ success within the context of commercial or institutional galleries). Many artists move from one ARI to another over the years, constantly engaged with specific times, communities and places, rather than using an ARI role as a stepping stone to a commercial or institutional position. ARIs are certainly a training ground for talent, but the idea that artists/ practitioners only inhabit ARIs for a short gestation period and move on to 'something bigger or better' is not the broad reality. Involvement with ARIs is addictive!

One of the aspects of working/ volunteering to help run an ARI is that working roles cross genres over a broad range of key career focus areas in the arts. Artist become curators, writers, install assistants and technical support in addition to working with community outreach and education. In this fashion, ARIs breed adaptable arts workers and actualise the many faceted nature of the contemporary artist, able to work across broad contexts with confidence and flexibility. This experience leads artists to a multitude of new outcomes, including continued engagement with different ARIs as well as employment within the commercial gallery scene and institutions as writers, curators or install crew parallel to their own studio practice.

ARIs in regional areas have a different set of parameters from larger cities (with larger and more diverse gallery scenes). Regional artists are working to generate space and focus for their community and to create opportunities to help encourage local artists to stay around and not migrate to bigger centres. In this case, regional ARI director and volunteer roles are often taken up by a mix of those who are committed to local community, alongside individuals who want to get hands-on and professional practice development experience prior to heading off to larger urban centres.

The goldmine of artist run projects and galleries, apart from their constant representation of and innovation by young, new or experimental practitioners, is the valuing of art in a context not commercial imperatives. The discoveries made within a project, the provocations that the ideas produce and the resulting conversation are the main purpose in terms of outcomes. Most ARIs have flexibility in their approach, driven by the individuals donating their time and energy. ARIs are commonly engage in short term projects, often with short lead-in times, allowing the genesis of exhibitions of a rapid fire nature that are less likely to be seeded within institutional contexts. This compression of project genesis leads to wild experimentation and risk taking, which makes working with ARIs both volatile and rewarding with a focus on process.

Working on artist run projects and initiatives is exciting! It will lead you into the unknown, grounded in the moment and focussed on enquiry. ARIs are significant sites of cultural innovation. Getting involved with ARIs involves putting ideas into action and provides vast experience equipping you for many possible career trajectories. These endeavours provide a unique synergy for artists, which feeds on their own practice and creates enduring networks that strengthen the Australian scene.

Lionel Bawden is a Sydney based artist working across sculpture, performance, installation and painting, exploring themes of flux, transformation, labour, the passing of time and oblique investigations of the human condition.

Money
Sarah Rodigari

It was 10am Sunday morning, on the final day of the WAH Symposium when a group of us sat down to discuss that old elusive topic of money in relation to the already greased up and finely tuned to the scent of an oily ragged world Artist Run Initiatives.

I was invited to chair this roundtable discussion topic as a representative of Field Theory, a collective of which I am a member. Field Theory came together in 2009. We shared a common belief and interest in developing what we felt at the time was a much need dialogue around approaches to performance in contemporary art practice. The background of the collective members varies to include theatre, visual arts, tactile media, participation, comedy and music.

The more we met and the more we talked, the more it became clear that intrinsic to the type of work we were interested in is the type of funding that occurs or doesn't occur alongside it. Questions arose such as how do arts organisations and institutions in Australia support arts practices that extend beyond traditional funding notions of hybridity. Following this line of enquiry we came up with idea that perhaps our extended arts community might be interested in supporting this type of work and in turn help create more of a profile, platform and dialogue for this in Australia.

Field Theory set up a small crowd-funding model in 2010, which invites peers, extended community and general public to become part of a community of people interested in supporting alternative models of arts practice in Australia. Membership costs $100 per year. The sum of this money is divided among four artists, two from the Field Theory collective and two from elsewhere. This year they have been invited from the subscriber group. If full membership is reached, the artist receives a total of $5000 to go towards a current project. In return the artist sends a gift to each member of Field Theory. The remainder of the money, $2000, is used for administrative costs and postage of the gift on behalf of the artist.

For WAH, Field Theory and its funding model was used as a premise for a discussion in which to consider how ARIs might be able to pursue alternative avenues to generate financial support. Now in its second year and still yet to reach its total membership, the funding model proposed by Field Theory is by no means an answer to how artists and ARIs can secure financial support to ensure survival, hopefully longevity and most importantly, a space for dialogue and innovative growth in contemporary art practice. During the discussion we agreed that the example of Field Theory emphasizes how important it is for an artist to feel and be part of a community. Further to this, it is clear that ARIs play a significant role in housing this community. As suggested by Kelli McClusky from PVI Collective who took park in this round table, it is in being a part of a community that we feel as though we can help each other and in turn help ourselves.

Luke Sinclair from Sticky Institute in Melbourne gave as an example their managing to raise $15000 through hosting a party for their zine community. A successful example of sourcing funding from outside the art sector can be seen in the recently established Alaska Projects, a gallery space situated inside a disused storage space in a Kings Cross car park. Funding for this gallery was secured with the support of the Sydney Parking Authority.

The topic of money and ARIs generated significant discussion around the pressing issue of rent and sustainability. As rent continues to rise rapidly, especially in capital cities such as Melbourne and Sydney, how is it possible to maintain a gallery without passing the cost onto artists? In keeping with seeking alternative avenues, it was suggested that funding could be sourced from other sectors outside the arts such as tourism, health and transport, tourism being of significant value and use for those in regional ARIs.

However it is important to acknowledge that in tourism, contemporary art is often considered alongside 'creative industry' and the relationship between how creative industry and contemporary art practice coexist is a complex topic worthy of further discussion perhaps as another roundtable at the next symposium?

The struggle to pay rent is ongoing. Whilst some ARIs are moving away from operating out of a gallery (for example Tape Projects in Melbourne who simply hire a venue when necessary), the question remains as to how effective this might be for many ARIs such as those who offer subsidized residency programs.

In closing we all agreed that money and the arts is a slippery business. We all hoped that one day councils and government would want to further support the cultural value that ARIs bring to local communities and subsidize their exorbitant rent on a larger scale. Until then, we confirmed in our circle of cheeky optimism that we have each other.

Sarah Rodigari is a member of Melbourne based collective Field Theory.

ARIs in the National Cultural Policy

Tamara Winikoff

At the National Cultural Policy roundtable, our task was to think about what ARIs might want to see included in such a policy. To get the creative juices flowing, we asked ourselves three key questions:

- where are we now?
- where do we want to be in ten years time?
- what do we need to do to get there?

It was noted that the only other similar policy produced in Australia's history – the 1994 Keating Government's 'Creative Nation' – had an emphasis on new media, cultural diversity, new forms of practice and infrastructure and a big budget attached. Those priorities still apply though some things have changed. One of the changes is not surprisingly, that there is little prospect of generous government funding and their increasing emphasis on getting the private sector to contribute to supporting the arts. However, the need for government financial support is a constant, and the only questions are how much and for what. As an example, the most interesting proposition which came from Kevin Rudd's 2020 Summit in 2008 was that one percent of the Australian budget should be put towards developing arts and culture.

The current Arts Minister, Simon Crean has reinvigorated the subject by producing a national cultural policy discussion paper, seeking response from the arts sector. It has proposed four goals and focused on:

- core arts (art for art's sake)
- creative industries (including film, tv, broadcasting, publishing, on-line media etc)
- cultural heritage with a focus on Indigenous practice.

In thinking about the four goals in the National Cultural Policy discussion paper, roundtable participants asked themselves the four questions that came from a cross-artform forum NAVA had held a month before:

- how can the arts shape the world's future?
- how can the arts be valued?
- what is the artist's responsibility in this changing world?
- what is required for Australia to achieve a better cultural future?

Participants questioned the use of 'world class' in the discussion paper and agreed that Australia needs to be more culturally confident in the world and not rely on simple stereotypes to characterize our culture. It was felt the environment of political and economic instability is flowing through institutions creating anxiety and confusion. It was asserted that Australia should be a place where art is part of everyday life with all types of people participating. In the changing world environment, there is the need for arts to be central to people's education and a highly valued part of the school curriculum with teachers trained to encourage qualities of flexibility and critical thinking in children – participation, skills development and innovation, rather than instruction.

Participants pointed out that the arts not only contribute to the economy, but also produce other kinds of value: spiritual; intellectual; and social. But these are difficult to quantify and are therefore not well recognised. It was agreed that we are in an increasingly conservative environment which avoids risk. Government funding models are slow to respond to change and not fluid enough. What is needed instead of large scale funding is to have smaller more nimble grants for supporting emerging artists and invested in diverse projects; a grant system that is more responsive with "funding as an enabler rather than a provider".

Then in the short time frame left, we cut to the chase with some other specific concrete proposals made for:

- building artists' capacity through facilitating information exchange and setting up partnerships
- brokerage of career opportunities for artists
- appreciation of divergent practice and individual creative output, and developing dialogue around it
- recognition and valuing of artists being at the cutting edge of exploration.
- The use of technology is changing art practice as well as forms of communication. Needed is more opportunity and support for artists' exploratory practices, including transdisciplinarity and making of connections beyond the arts, and a legal repository for digital material
- physical exchange with more residencies through institutions
- tax exemption for artist and other creatives, recognizing that artists do a lot of free work and it's unsustainable
- setting aside a certain amount of space for artists in urban development
- more arts research, both theoretical and exploratory, and to help us understand the nature of the Australian visual arts sector.

For NAVA, this session represented a valuable consultation with the sector to hear the opinions of emerging artists and ARIs about key issues which affect their professional lives. These ideas were included in NAVA's submission in response to the National Cultural Policy discussion paper.

Tamara Winikoff is the Executive Director of the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA), the peak body representing the professional interests of the Australian visual arts, craft and design sector.

WAH Debate
Sunday, 4 September 2011

That it is the role of emerging artists to be innovative, cutting-edge, experimental, groundbreaking and boundary-pushing.

1st Affirmative Lisa Havilah
2nd Affirmative Adam Geczy
3rd Affirmative Edward Colless

1st Negative Frances Barrett
2nd Negative Luke Sinclair
3rd Negative Courtney Coombs

The Half-Baked Notes of the First Speaker:
Frances Barrett

Hello Comrades.
Hello Bureaucrats.
Hello esteemed members of the affirmative.

You know, when I first found out that I would be debating against these three figures – who between them hold positions as professors, doctors and the head and creative force of one of the most important institutions in Australia – I thought to myself, "Frances, this is not fair. I am but an artist, perhaps a light weight comparative to the minds and experience of the affirmative". Let's face it, they hold the critical weight of this table. But I told myself, "Don't be nervous. Don't be nervous. Frances, do you know why you shouldn't be nervous? Because you are right". The negative are right. You know why?

Because it is an impossibility to proscribe the role of the artist.

"That it is the role of emerging artists to be innovative, cutting-edge, experimental, groundbreaking and boundary-pushing." This my comrades, is not only reiteration and tautology, but it is a false statement, an impossibility. It is a proscription of the worst kind. And speaking within my role as one of the three representative 'artists' in this debate, I refuse any onus demanded of me in any of the roles within my life; let alone by seemingly bureaucratic, exclusionary, institutionalised and subjective terms. If I allowed and subjected myself to such demands of my character I would be married, working as an accountant and with one on the way. So let's think for ourselves, let's reconsider this statement. It is the negative's argument:

That it is NOT the role of emerging artists to be innovative BLAH BLAH BLAH, but that every artist should be active.

And by active we mean charged, on, open, responsive, connected, making. Active can be politicised. It can be introspective. It can be ready to erupt. Producing. It can be making artwork. It can be running a space. It can be questioning and thinking. Studying and curating. It can be working solo or within a collective. An active artist is someone contributing what skills and knowledge and attitude and experience they have to this big bad world. There may even be no product.

Today I will talk to you about the problematic terms of this statement: I will take you through 'emerging artist' and expand on what 'active' means.

The second speaker, Luke, will address the implications of these terms in regards to their 'exclusivity' and also discuss the limited notion of what is accepted as innovation, in particular how 'technology' is perceived by funding bodies as what is the cutting edge of artistic practice. The third speaker, Courtney, will summarise our argument, demoralise the opposition's case and win you over with her fiery oratory genius.

But first my rebuttal….secondly, my argument.

As this is a debate premised on slippery definitions, my argument will be to dismantle the definitions; the notions of 'emerging artist' and 'innovation'. For me, I found it hard to write this speech because I can't find an argument.

There is no argument because there is no such thing as an 'emerging artist'.

OK so on to the notion of an 'emerging artist'. The negative do not agree with the term 'emerging artist'. "Emerging: to become apparent, important or prominent. Coming into existence. Coming to maturity." If you haven't emerged, you don't exist. In what platform are you not existing? If you don't exhibit in a 'professional context', or are not making profit from your work, or not being represented then are you continually emerging? You don't exist until you have an institutional show? If you are in the early stages of your artistic 'career' then your practice is not yet developed, your ideas are forming, learning how to be an artist. Soaking like a sponge. How then can you definitively fulfill the role of 'the innovator'? The only reason that this term emerged was because of funding bodies needing to delineate younger or non-institutional showing people. When people ask you "What Do You Do?", do you reply "Well, I'm an emerging artist"? No! When is it that you define yourself as an emerging artist? When you need to tick that box within an online funding application.

Hello AusCo. Hello Arts NSW.

Yes I am emerging. I have been practicing for less than 5 years. I am under 30. I am developing my practice and professional skills.

'Emerging'. It's an online category. Not praxis.

Let me give you the second context for 'emerging'. When commercial gallerists pick up a young, hot under 35 artist, what do they say to their potential client? "Oh yes have you seen what's in our 'offshoot project space'? She is currently emerging. She will be the next big thing. Buy now. Before it's too late. This gallery is certainly on the pulse of the underground." It is more powerful and true to say that you are an artist. It is a setback and insult to say that you are emerging.

It is a bureaucratic fabrication and a commercial by-line.

Therefore, as there is no such thing as an emerging artist, there is no substantiated argument of the affirmative.

Now, onto my second point:
that experimentation and risk taking can be attributed to artists of all generations and abilities.

Artists at the peak of their career can be taking risks and being experimental. Every artist should be active. Active in their idiosyncratic way. Producing whatever they want to. Whether it be critical or not. Expressive or illustrative or offensive or purely aesthetic.

The terms 'innovative', 'cutting-edge', 'experimental', 'groundbreaking' and 'boundary-pushing' are subjective.

Two years ago I became involved as Director of Sydney ARI, Serial Space which has a foundation in the sound and experimental music community. I would go to events at our space and think to myself, "This is boring, self indulgent scraping soundscapes that remind me of taking a bad trip in an demolition yard." How did I know that these people were progressive sound artists, pushing the boundary of what sound is? Hacking and re-configuring things like mixers and oscillators? I obviously still don't understand. I thought of it as a cloud of pain around my head, not groundbreaking practice. What is one woman's pain is another woman's pushed envelope. It is all subjective.

Let's condense this statement somewhat. Let's distil these terms 'risk' and 'experimentation'. Donald Brooks states that "Art is experimental action". It is to take an action into the unknown. But as we heard earlier today, not all art is radical, not all artists are radical. I don't deny that there is some work out there that could be deemed as more experimental and risky; that unexpected outcomes and unintended results develop our knowledge and experience of the world and push our understanding of a particular form. But is it the responsibility of the 'emerging artist' to consistently be experimental? What type of practices are we discussing here? A critically engaged contemporary arts practice? Are we discussing a tertiary educated, learned practice?

No! The negative refuses to make such delineations. And in the statement there is no limitation to the artists that we are referring to. We are including all artists, from community-based arts project participants to post-post-feminist performance artists.

Does it a matter what the intention and drive behind the artist and/or their work is; whether it is political, expressive, revolutionary or an egg-carton crocodile made with your 4 year-old niece?

Artists produce a product that is particular to them and their needs, or their context or the current political climate etc. It is art critics and art historians who analyse the depth and affect of these works and practices. It can be those people that can determine (within their own particular lens) what is perhaps innovative. These people can offer frameworks to approach these works as boundary-pushing blah blah blah. Or equally they can condemn them for not being resolved. It is all subjective.

Finally, my conclusion.
It is our argument today that it is not the role of emerging artists to be innovative BLAH BLAH BLAH, but that every artist should be active. We are, comrades and bureaucrats, free to identify as an artist, and free to produce any form of work and free to subvert any role that is demanded of us.

We Are Here not to be limited to the cliché notion of the radical youthful artist.
We Are Here to be artists.
We Are Here to produce work and ideas.
We Are Here to work hard.
We Are Here to establish spaces
We Are Here to give opportunities
We Are Here to take opportunities
We Are Here to question everything.
We Are Here to be activated.
We Are Here to be active.

Frances Barrett is a Sydney based artist and member of performance and video collaboration group Brown Council.

WAH Essays

Writers:

Jacqueline Millner
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Alex Gawronski
Jonathan Middleton
Lois Keidan
Zanny Begg

We are…have been…here: a brief, selective look at the history of Sydney ARIs

Jacqueline Millner

We are here…have been here…will be here, if in shifting guises and at different levels of intensity. The energy that gives rise to artist-run initiatives may emerge in novel places and in various forms, but it has been a constant in Sydney for decades. From promoting 'alternative' exhibiting practices to expressing marginalised perspectives, from creating artist-run commercial enterprises to embedding an artists' space in a local community or levering social activism through the artist's cultural capital, ARIs have helped shape what we understand by contemporary art in Australia today. They have been integral to forging an expanded field for the creation, exhibition and reception of art, providing not only a variety of different physical spaces to work and network, but also more importantly a variety of different discourses to conceptualise what art is and might be.

In Sydney, the history of ARIs might commence as far back as the early decades of the 20th century, with the formation of artist societies such as The Contemporary Group and the Society of Artists, although neither of these had the 'avant-garde' credentials of Melbourne's Contemporary Art Society (CAS) which championed new forms in the face of the government-backed Academy of Australian Art. These societies afforded opportunities for artists to show their work, but also provided a forum for artists to discuss new developments in politics as much as in art, and to organise and advocate for particular approaches. The CAS has been described as "Australia's most influential artists" organisation': it "played a pivotal role in the Sydney art world for twenty years", holding its first exhibition in Sydney in 1940.[1] However, the more commonly cited predecessors of current ARIs are the spaces that sprang up in the 1960s and 70s as hubs to support emerging practices, including Central Street and Inhibodress.

Central Street was founded in 1966. It became renowned as 'the artist run centre of hard edged abstraction', although according to artist Ian Milliss, its significance was broader: a place which confirmed his "understanding that art could be a type of philosophical debate carried out with images and actions, not just the business of manufacturing expensive decorative images of scenery".[2] The importance of this discursive role for artists' initiatives was highlighted when, shortly after it took control of Central Street in 1970, the CAS closed the gallery in order to focus on *CAS Broadsheet*, a publication that sought to pursue art not as the production of objects but as political activism. *CAS Broadsheet*'s campaign fronts included artists' working conditions, institutional critique (*avant la lettre*) and the politics of urban redevelopment, enduring concerns for many ARIs to this day.

The year that Central Street gallery closed, the artist cooperative Inhibodress opened as a site for emerging conceptual, video and performance art. Its practices were soon affirmed by key critical voices of the day, and Inhibodress was soon recognised for playing "a major role in introducing conceptual art in the Sydney art scene".[3] Even those critical of what they saw as the (internationally) derivative nature of much work exhibited there in its two year lifespan acknowledge that "the critical fixation with Inhibodress and 'official' avant-gardism…accidentally created the seeds of a real avant-garde situation in parts of the Sydney art world", with many artists, "unreviewed although not particularly unknown", choosing to work "outside the gallery system".[4]

These two impulses – the desire to create a network 'outside the gallery system' and mainstream criticism, and the drive to transform art into an alternative discourse – continued to infuse the development of ARIs in the 1970s and 80s. During this period, groups of artists took advantage of idle urban 'ruins' to set up crucibles for experimentation and nodes for interaction which were often genuinely interdisciplinary, encompassing music, performance and screen cultures as much as visual art. Exuding the aesthetics of immediacy and improvisation, with hardly a gyprocked wall in sight, places like Side FX in Surry Hills and Art Unit in Alexandria nurtured Sydney's post-punk DIY generation of artists.[5]

The 1980s also saw the establishment of Sydney's longest running ARI, Firsdraft (in 1986), which in some ways pioneered the model for the 'professionalisation' of such spaces that began in earnest in the 1990s and reached its apogee in the last decade with several ARIs taking on qualities more often associated with commercial galleries. Firstdraft was set up with government funding and from the beginning was committed to the principles of 'sound administration'; artists were provided with contracts and financial statements, and protected by public liability insurance and guidelines on the sale of work.[6] As Firstdraft's official history notes, "efforts put into the creation of a clean, orderly type of space, along with an increased emphasis on the cultivation of formalised artist/gallery relations, all developed out of the objective of presenting as close a face as possible to that of any commercial gallery".[7]

This approach and its consonance with funding body objectives no doubt has had something to do with the gallery's longevity; but that is not to say that it strays from the ARI's aim to be less 'alternative' than 'discursive'.[8] ARIs during this period became increasingly aware of the limits of institutional critique, recognizing, as US artist Andrea Fraser put it, that "what is announced and perceived as art is always already institutionalised", and that there was a move away from "the critique of institutions" and towards "an institution of critique".[9] Not all ARIs self-consciously functioned as "highly charged zones of contention, resistance and difference",[10] as they were described in one attempt to bring ARIs within the institutional umbrella of state-funded contemporary art spaces.[11] And yet, some of them, including Street Level and Boomali Aboriginal Artists Collective, did function precisely in this way.

Street Level opened in 1983 in Penrith, before moving to Blacktown, with the clear mission to give a voice to artists marginalized by their location in Western Sydney. It sought to be as inclusive as possible, supporting local migrant and amateur artists, as well as youth and pop culture in the area and the work produced by the newly opened University of Western Sydney art school. Not charging exhibiting artists rent was key to this inclusiveness.[12] The 1987 foundation of Boomalli[13] – meaning 'to strike, to make a mark, to fight back, to light up' in the languages of the Kamilaroi, Wiradjuri and Bundjalung peoples – was also prompted by frustration at the art establishment's myopic vision, in this case its persistent neglect of the work of urban Aboriginal artists.[14] Boomalli's role in exhibiting, organizing and consolidating this generation of Indigenous artists has been widely acknowledged as an important factor in achieving wide recognition for urban Aboriginal art, both nationally and internationally.

With the embrace of the commercial model (including gallery cut on sales, advertising and active courting of collectors), this more explicit political positioning by ARIs has become rarer in recent years. However, the resurfacing of battles over public space and urban redevelopment, together with the widespread use of social media, have again placed artists' collectives and networks in strategic positions of organizing and advocating for change. The artist collective Squatspace[15], for example, was forged in a cleared out locksmith shop in December 2000 amid the fight to save the Broadway squats. The gallery "played host to political film screenings, free dinners, durational performances, experimental sound nights and site-specific installations" throughout the yearlong occupation.[16] After the squatters' eviction, Squatspace continued its projects on the politics of urban space through what was now a 'spaceless' organisation.[17]

The questioning of the need for a permanent physical location and engagement with a local community have given rise to many innovative forms of ARIs. Particularly poetic responses to the space problem include Glovebox and Briefcase, which literally held exhibitions in these portable, functional devices,[18] and The Network of Uncollectable Artists (NUCA, founded 2004) whose first project was the production of a set of collectable "bubblegum cards" featuring Australia's 50 Most UnCollectable Artists. The ARI Elastic, meantime, ran for only six months in 2000, during which time it set out to incorporate its art into the local residents' daily lives, the feedback from local 'art virgins' infinitely more meaningful than that of the art critical establishment.[19] After it closed, Elastic kept its project alive for several years through publications, another key strategy that ARIs have used to generate novel contexts for thinking through art. In the tradition of *CAS Broadsheet*, artist-run magazines and journals such as *Lives of the Artists*[20] and *Runway*[21], and artist-generated blogs, do much of the discursive work formerly limited to physical spaces.

South, Pendulum, Selenium, Blaugrau, Side-on, The Catacombs, CBD, W.I.N.D.O.W., Loose Projects, Rubyayre, Imperial Slacks...the list of Sydney ARIs that have come and gone is extensive; some were poignantly captured in Andrew Hurle's work *76 Defunct Artist-run galleries - Melbourne and Sydney 2002/2003*[22] which photographed and archived each gallery's exterior to create what the artist called 'abstracted tabloid "obituaries" for artist-initiated activities'[23]. These initiatives are testament to the inexhaustible drive to think and make art differently, and to the generosity and vision of the many individuals involved (some of whom even opened up their own private homes[24]) dedicated to facilitating artistic creation and interaction.

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Notes

1 'Its two annual exhibitions, one for members and the other for young artists were second only to the Archibald Prize as the major events of the Sydney art calendar': Wendy Carlson, 'The Invisible Artist', 2006, Ian Milliss website: http://www.ianmilliss.com/text/textindex.htm

2 ibid. n.p.

3 Sue Cramer, *Inhibodress Retrospective*, an exhibition and catalogue of work shown at Inhibodress Gallery in Sydney from 1970-72, PICA, 1990.

4 Ian Milliss. 'Obituary: Inhibodress Gallery 1970-1972', *CAS Broadsheet*, September 1972, pp.17-18

5 The history around some of these initiatives was recently revisited in *Circa 1979: Signal to Noise*, conference on the post-punk scene hosted by The Sydney Festival in 2010.

6 'History', Firstdraft website: http://firstdraftgallery.com/about-2/history-2/, last accessed 5 November 2011

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Andrea Fraser, 'From the critique of institutions to an institution of critique', *Artforum*, September 2005, p.281

10 Nicholas Tsoutas, 'Preface', *Critical Spaces: an Artspace project*, Sydney: Artspace, 1994, np.

11 Critical Spaces hosted by Artspace in 1994 entailed a suite of exhibitions, a publication and a forum to highlight the work of Sydney ARIs. The same year also saw the cementing of links between several ARIs and state-funded contemporary art spaces through Six of the Best and the Art Bus tour. In 2005, the Museum of Contemporary Art exhibition Situation also attempted to bring ARIs into the institutional fold, although this time in the context of over a decade of what came to be known as 'relational aesthetics'.

12 Adam Lucas, 'Spaces of inclusion: embracing cultural difference in Western Sydney', *Critical Spaces: an Artspace project*, Sydney: Artspace, 1994, np.

13 Founding members included Michael Riley, Bronwyn Bancroft, Jeffrey Samuels, Fiona Foley, Tracey Moffatt, Arone Meeks, Euphemia Bostock, Avril Quail, Brenda L Croft & Fernanda Martens.

14 'A History', Boomali website: http://www.boomalli.com.au/history.html, last accessed 5 November 2011.

15 Coordinated principally by Lucas Ihlein and Mickie Quick

16 Squatspace website: http://squatspace.com/

17 The role of Squatspace and other artist organisations in the politics of urban space was recently considered in the exhibition The Right to the City at the Tin Sheds (2011). The exhibitions/events There goes the neighbourhood (Carriageworks 2009) and It's a new day (Artspace, 2006) also highlighted the relationships between ARIs and grass roots community activism.

18 Briefcase was curated by Simon Barney; Glovebox by Barney and Chris Fortescue; they came out of the defunct ARI SOUTH, taking place in public spaces including the Hollywood Hotel in Surry Hills and a car park in Newtown.

19 Leah McLeod, 'Elastic contemporary art projects', *globe e-journal*, http://www.artdes.monash.edu.au /globe/issue11/eltxt.html

20 Edited and self published by Elizabeth Pulie, *Lives of the Artists* lasted 10 issues between 2002 and 2005.

21 Founded in 2002 and first edited by Jaki Middleton, *Runway* is still operating today as a not for profit independent publication managed by artists, writers and curators.

22 Included in *Elastic Printed Project* (2004), and *Pitch Your Own Tent* at Monash University Gallery (2005)

23 http://www.andrewhurle.com/71/71.html

24 Front Room and Grey Matter are just two examples.

A History of Success?
Din Heagney

How does an artist-run initiative measure success and look to the future in the light of history? Is it personal or professional, something tangible or measurable? Is it about longevity and fame? Is it related to experimentation or rebellion? Or is it prosaic, based on funding and professionalisation?

We know that art doesn't work within the same rigid definitions of other industries; the way science can measure success through proof of hypothesis, or business in revenue and returns. A commercial gallery could measure success based on reviews or sales, a museum could measure it on operating budgets and attendance, but an ARI is a more subjective enterprise, often connected to social and theoretical concerns, as much as the practical presentation of emergent art. There's not enough space here to fully examine these concerns, but we can look briefly at some critical functions of existing artist run models:

Gallery Models
– low-fi auxiliaries of established modes, providing spaces for experimentation in exhibition format, as well as the development of professional skills in areas such as administration, curation and negotiation;

Practice Models
– the extension of prior learning within an open peer environment to define and refine artist practice through critical development of preconceived forms;

Project Models
– the locus for short-term, temporary or one-off projects that critically exist within conceptual or predetermined situations such as artist publishing or festival programming, and;

Collective Models
– a non-spatial but centralised focus for formal and informal group activities based on shared artistic, philosophical or material enquiry.

ARIs can be combinations of all of these and more, something that rarely happens within the frameworks of commercial and institutional models, where professional specialisation is increasingly preferred, and inclusive access to shared skills can be limited.[1] Many of us are aware of the kinds of hybridisation taking place across the arts, where organisations adopt various structural strategies from existing spaces to create new models that are neither ARIs and yet resemble them, nor are they purely commercial but operate under one or another type of business model. The effects of these hybrid practices will become clearer in the future. Until then it is perhaps better to look at history.

'ARI' itself is a term largely implemented by the Australia Council and adopted by other arts funding bodies and arts media to categorise what is otherwise a complex set of divergent artist practices. 'Artist run space' as a qualifier is too restrictive, as the term implies only exhibition models located in a physical place, although the term is still in wide use. 'Artist run initiative' as a more inclusive term became established over the last decade and is now in common use in Australia and numerous other countries.

Even the terms 'artist' and 'curator' have their own preconceptions. Hybridisation and cross-disciplinary practices are revealing definitions as inadequate, showing that they no longer fit as comfortably within the gallery and museum models. The use of any umbrella category has become problematic in assessing where an artist run activity fits into the broader arts sector, and therefore how it can be assessed, if indeed it even needs to be. This kind of semiotic slippage can be seen as a representation of the variety of practices and rationales in these artist activities, ones that continue to emerge from post-structural, relational and other recent theoretical compositions.

One of the discrepancies in critical arts practice is this insistence on divisional and often divisive definitions. So when we think about how Contemporary Arts Organisations Australia (CAOS) organisations compare to Australian commercial gallery businesses, or how these both relate to state run institutions, independent, public or privately funded art organisations, are we in fact engaging in critical, but not necessarily useful, thinking?[2] Should we even be concerned with critiquing the top-heavy practice models in the arts? Or could we conveniently ignore them until we have developed those skills that lead into a closer, some may say complicit, relationship with professional organisations? Commentators often call this the grassroots feeder system; rhisomic forms that grow up only to be eaten by the larger beasts of the art world. Perhaps being consumed will itself become a measure of success in the future.

Similarly, governments have a significant influence on artist run models. Funding bodies have shaped the way artist run initiatives structure and promote themselves. The list of requirements expected from ARIs that seek funding can often be overwhelming for a small organisation. These may include governance, financial planning, compliance, risk assessment, insurance, occupational health and safety, adherence to censorship guidelines, establishing and maintaining management committees and boards, and so forth. This is essentially professionalising artistic activity in what is largely a volunteer-based sector. In this, often constrictive, environment, ARIs can hardly be expected to represent ideals of artistic freedom.

The most commonly used measures of success in government-funded models of ARIs are the funding bodies themselves. The application management and acquittal processes of operational and program funding, are all set according to government performance indicator measures, themselves adopted from corporate management principles. One then has to ask, do these priorities play too dominant a role in the outcomes of artist run activity, given that they are the only standard measures in place? We then have to ask whether government funding bodies should avoid categorisation of practices within the independent visual arts sector altogether? Yet looser categories would likely increase competition between arts groups, and could even lead to further limits placed on funding bodies through policy shifts.

While not necessarily a negation of creativity, this type of institutionalisation of artist run practice can remove the degree of risk and experimentation required in the making of good art. It can force many individual practitioners to turn away from engagement with the ARI sector, or it could potentially lead to a type of creative rebellion. It may be that this kind of professionalisation should be deliberately avoided by artists, left to arts management graduates and larger organisations already in place that can act as facilitators and mediators within the complexities and differentiations between artist groups and government. This is what Clive Robertson discussed in the relation of government policy to artist run culture where he used Foucault's notion of "working with, and not for, the government".[3]

Internationally, we can find similar trends. While attending the NY Art Book Fair at MoMA PS1 and Alternative Histories at Exit Art last year,[4] it became clear that many Australian artist run models are largely in line with international practices. In the USA, there is once again a growing ARI sector with a focus on collaborative development such as Chicago's Groups and Spaces,[5] as well as further research emerging from independent artist-run collectives like the Institute for Applied Aesthetics.[6]

While there is possibly greater interest in the relational impacts of alternative and independent spaces from the art establishment in the USA and Europe, Australia still has some difficulties separating the roles of differing art structures and could learn from its allies internationally. This is compounded by competition in funding, and particularly a lack of unbiased criticism both in mainstream and independent media. In these ways, artist run activity comes to be seen not so much as feeder systems but as incubator systems for the application of new ideas, particularly radical concepts that cannot easily exist within larger institutional frameworks.

Spatial and relational aesthetics have abounded in ARI practice since the theories became popular in the 1990s and their effects are often clear in the kinds of relational art that are shown in artist run spaces. Nicolas Bourriaud, a key theorist in relational theory, agreed when asked about ARI practice in Australia that they "all are mainly concerned by networks, discussions, contacts, face-to-face relationships with the beholder".[7] While there are many examples of relational theories being applied within ARI practice, could we see this as an example of asking the same questions, rather than posing entirely new ones? Reliance on popular international theory can expand art practices but can also detract from local emergent practices that are otherwise swept up in a type of cultural globalism.

It is also interesting to look at ARIs as alternatives within their spatial significance, physically but also more broadly and in light ideas like Bachelard's 'poetics of space',[8] which explores the significance of a place being more than its physical makeup, one that is embedded within history and the collective imagination of similar places that can only be truly experienced on a personal level. Whether poetics is present within the confines of a white cube is debatable, and usually it is the art presented within this common model that takes up the role of inscribing meaning to an absent poetic. ARIs that present in private homes, abandoned buildings, and other non-traditional spaces can offer a foray into this kind of spatial relations that sometimes contains richer associations for both the art and the audience. The measures of success here could be whether the ideas are taken up and duplicated, or even whether the artists choose to work again with such collectives.

When people move on from ARIs, which regularly occurs, then what happens to all those local spaces, archives, collections and documentation that would otherwise inform history? Organisations like the Art Spaces Archive Project in New York exist to "preserve, present and protect the archival heritage of living and defunct for- and not-for-profit spaces of the 'alternative' and 'avant garde' movement of the 1950s through to the present throughout the United States".[9] This kind of collective project is archiving vital documentation, not just for artist run futures but also for historical context required by the institutions who have consumed those artists and imbued them with this abstract thing we call 'success'.

Australia has no repository yet for these important ARI practices and histories. It is worth asking whether ARIs, even individual artists, are now repeating one another, creating the same mandates, exploring similar theoretical propositions, essentially documenting old ideas in spaces of critical stasis that do not look back because the past is boxed away somewhere in the world, living on inside the minds of former members, or simply lost. Ultimately, if we can't look back then how can we ever really look forward?

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Out of the Past: Beyond the Four Fundamental Fallacies of Artist Run Initiatives

Alex Gawronski

Artist Run Initiatives (ARIs) have, since their inception here in the 1960s and 70s, undergone numerous metamorphoses. Today, the various activities of ARIs are arguably more visible than they have been for some time. Nevertheless, such visibility does not automatically translate to a more enlightened attitude from either artists or audiences regarding the actual or potential roles of ARIs. Indeed, over time the role and function of ARIs has shifted from one of quasi-resistance and the questioning of commonly held (essentially commercial) perceptions of contemporary art, to one largely of acquiescence and thoughtless professionalism. Naturally, there will always be anomalies and exceptions to the rule. Still, certain problematic assumptions cling to broader perceptions of what ARIs are and do. Such assumptions are the implicit result of changes to the contemporary cultural landscape and to an overemphasis on ARIs as primarily providing professional career opportunities for emerging artists.

Against these misleading and limiting notions, alternative ways of approaching ARIs politically can be posed. There are in fact ways that the scope and capabilities of ARIs could be greatly expanded for critical rather than expedient ends. Revivified knowledge of the oppositional capacity of ARIs - who are regularly encumbered with unnecessary bureaucratic terminology - has crucial connotations for the transfiguration of their often needlessly over prescribed self-definitions.

One of the most persistently erroneous notions attached to ARIs now is the idea that they are run primarily by and for emerging artists. As an art school graduate it is true that involvement in an ARI can be one of the most immediate and rewarding means of developing an understanding of the local, and broader, contemporary art milieu. However, this conception has severely limiting connotations as it removes an understanding of ARIs as primarily quasi-autonomous spaces operating independently of government and commercial museums and galleries. Of course, the habitual association of ARIs (an arbitrary descriptor anyway) with 'emerging' (an equally arbitrary term), operates too as a convenient means for funding bodies to circumscribe the extent of their activities.

Related and equally problematic is the pervasive perception of ARIs as 'training grounds' for future arts professionals. This is a base industry model that identifies art production with utility and quantifiable outcomes. From this viewpoint, ARIs are mainly valuable for the degree to which those who run them can integrate with the dominant cultural landscape as a proven indicator of artistic success. From such a vantage point an ARI is merely a means to an end, nothing but an entrepreneurial finishing school for "tomorrow's young cultural industrialists".[1]

Another core fallacy attached to ARIs is a belief in them as fundamentally democratic. While such a claim may seem well intentioned - as anything invoking the sacred word 'democracy' usually does - it is actually dissimulating and disingenuous. The image of ARIs as bastions of cultural democracy only serves to present them as part of a leveled field where, blandly, every ARI is perceived as essentially the same and of equal cultural worth. From here it is subsequently assumed that all ARIs are 'in-it-together', working for the same ends and in the same ways.

A further commonly held strategic misconception of the task of ARIs and one connected to the previous point, is the supposition, particularly evident today, that ARIs should aim, like advertising, to reach the largest possible audiences. This is a consensual model of culture that is elsewhere highly evident to negative effect in contemporary politics, as will duly be discussed.

Given the combined impact of the misconceptions mentioned above, it would be fitting to redress them in an effort to suggest more active solutions to the habitual presumptions on which they are based. For example, contrary to assumptions of the fundamentally 'emerging' dimension of ARIs is a commitment to ARIs as an ongoing alternative to existing, particularly commercially saturated modes of contemporary art production. In fact, these days it would seem entirely pertinent to abandon the constrictive and essentially bureaucratic term 'ARI' for 'artist space' or even just 'gallery'. While this may seem a moot point, it has broader implications. For example - and given that the term 'ARI' is attached almost automatically these days to the term 'emerging' - to utilise alternative terminology is also to reframe ARIs as not so much temporary utilitarian sites for 'career-development', but as possible sites for the development of other methodologies of production and presentation in the longer rather than shorter term. If more established artists were to found and direct artist spaces, the terrain of so-called ARIs would dramatically proliferate points of difference. This would not necessarily discount the entirely valid responsibility of artist spaces in supporting the activities of contemporary artists starting out either. The fact that more established artists do not engage with artist spaces at an operational level, only reinforces a commercialist conception of them as a strategic means to career ends.

Additionally, rather than viewing artist spaces as 'training grounds' it would be more positive to see them as spaces of genuine affiliation. Certainly artist spaces locally and internationally will obviously, according to their inclinations, have affinities with others. Similarly, an artist space ideally fosters the affiliations it attracts by supporting the work of artists whose modes of thinking about practice and exhibition it shares. Therefore, rather than being tokenistically 'democratic', going through the motions say of reviewing piles of anonymous proposals (some of which may still be accepted), the politics of affiliation is based on choice. More importantly though, such affiliation is based on knowledge. For artists who have been around long enough and who have engaged the terrain of contemporary art over years, connections are inevitably forged. These connections, rather than nepotistic, are primarily based on a politics of faith in the existing practices of artists who have a proven level of commitment to what they do. This does not discount work by younger artists who have not had the time to build up practices, in which case emphasis will always be given, as elsewhere, to the quality of ideas and evidence of a wider outlook. However, the politics of affiliation challenge the very basis of the way politics is understood these days as polarities have slowly been sucked into the black hole of centrism. Here politics is basically a question of administration, especially financial administration. Political differentiation in such a scene is really just a question of lip service where, as Deleuze and Guattari have indicated capitalism's minimum differential requirement must be seen to be 'democratically', enacted.[2] Needless to say it is a bland and vastly uninspiring scenario.

For contemporary artists though, and particularly for artists who establish their own domains, issues of lip service to democratic process are irrelevant. Artist spaces construct their own agendas, build their own affiliations and operate within networks according to the principles and proclivities that propel them. Of course, artist spaces are not islands. They exist in an art ecosystem whose existence should not, even if it were possible, be denied. In fact, there is considerable potential, although it is by no means maximized, for productive and critical interactions between artist spaces and other types of contemporary arts organisations. This is especially true when such spaces may share a focus on contemporary work beyond instant deference to a commodifying lens, where the work in question is large-scale, temporal and propositional.

As expected, one of the core differences between the artist affiliations developed by artist spaces and those of government organisations is the fact that the latter are fully beholden to due process. This usually means too that when an artist's work is accepted by a government organisation, the lag between acceptance and execution is at least a year, often more. A painter, photographer, video artist or object-maker may still produce art in the intervals between exhibiting, even if exhibition dates are yet to be set. On the other hand, if my *prima-materia* as an artist is space itself, or more specifically the multiple implications of the gallery as a crucially signifying space within contemporary culture, then this option is cancelled out. What does an artist choosing to work with gallery space do in the meantime? One option would be to endlessly script proposals for future projects taking into account statistical laws of attrition. This could be further accompanied by the generation of publicity for projects still to be realised, in the hope that this would amplify a desire to see them in others.

Nonetheless, if this is an answer then it casts art practice not so much as 'practiced' but as fundamentally static and bureaucratic like mainstream contemporary politics. Ultimately, the choice of space as a medium is not merely medium-specific either, it is also political. To offer the immaterial and temporal experience of the gallery as art, questions other rampantly commodifying tendencies within a global system already way beyond commodity extremes. And here again, the differential nature of artist spaces comes to the fore. Without having to necessarily wait for the opportunity to employ space as a critical tool, and without having to consider the pressures of automatically pre-empting work as commercially viable, the artist space provides a means by which spatially propositional artworks may be realised relatively immediately, and not just on paper.

Finally there is the question, related to a politics of affiliation and the notion of artist spaces as ideally providing alternatives, of targeted audiences. Assumed in most self-directed ventures, especially if they are narrowly framed as 'businesses', is an unspoken aim to reach as many people as possible. This is a consensual model. The consensual model neatly abuts with the administrative aspect of contemporary 'non' politics and seeks to keep genuine frictional differences in check. The truth of engaged and successful artist spaces however lies in the fact that their primary audiences are other artists. Such a realisation should not be surprising, as those closest to the coalface will always be most inquisitive as to what is happening there. Likewise, it is at the coalface that contemporary art is ultimately generated. It may be exhibited across platforms but it is out of affiliated artist cultures that art appears in the first place. What is done with it afterwards is quasi-arbitrary unless once more, artists exhibiting in artist spaces regard them only as springboards for getting out and into pastures viewed as greener, more glamorous and more quantifiably popular.
In the end, if the question is one of a future for artist spaces, then really this question cannot or should not be answered. There are only *futures* of artist spaces practiced in the present and resisting pre-determination. As soon as a definitive consensual future for artist spaces is posited along policy-making or other definitional lines then this future is already enclosed, restricted and curtailed. On the other hand, the multiple futures of artist spaces should not seek consensus but should deliberately develop various and conflicting stances and attitudes. At the same time, they should consider the truly political, that is a politics risked in limit testing as opposed to politics as it is habitually understood and which thoroughly misrepresents the political. As contemporary theorist Chantal Mouffe recently suggested, in a true democracy - and this includes artist spaces as sites of possible direct cultural democracy - distinctions between friend and enemy cannot be abolished.3 Artist-directed culture is (as contemporary theorist Chris Kraus, co-founder of semiotext(e) journal wrote recently) "where art belongs".4 Artist-directed culture should also be agonistic by definition. This means it should be prepared to stake something - a particular view of art and its contemporary role - at the expense of a vision of culture that sees only entrenched hierarchies or undifferentiated sameness. At their most active, engaged independent artist spaces are in reality different; they are vital, actually *defining,* entities in contemporary culture.

Alex Gawronski is an artist and writer based in Sydney. His exhibitions include the AGNSW, MCA Sydney, Artspace, Sydney, IMA Brisbane, AEAF Adelaide, SOFA Christchurch, NZ, Tokyo Wonder Site Japan and the BSR Italy.

Notes

1 Craig Owens, 'The Problem with Puerilism', in Craig Owens, *Beyond Recognition: Representation, Power and Culture*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Loss Angeles and Oxford, 1992, p.265.

2 See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's essay *'May '68 Did Not Take Place'* in Krauss C. and Lotringer S. eds., *Hatred of Capitalism, A Reader,* Semiotext(e)/ MIT Press, New York and Massachusetts, 2001.

3 See Chantal Mouffe (ed.), *The Challenge of Carl Scmitt*, Verso, London and New York, 1999.

4 See Chris Kraus, Where Art Belongs, Semiotext(e) Interventions/MIT Press, New York and Massachusetts, 2011.

Dear friends, artists, and cultural workers,
Jonathan Middleton

Dear friends, artists, and cultural workers,

This letter comes on the kind invitation from Brianna Munting and Georgie Meagher to provide a written component to the talk I gave at the *We Are Here* symposium of Artist Run Initiatives (ARIs) presented by the National Association for the Visual Arts and Firstdraft, in Sydney, September 2011.

I am hoping the form of a letter makes some sense to you. I would be happy if this text can help continue the conversation between artist-run organizations in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and around the globe. I look forward to any responses you may send my way.

My talk in Sydney was an attempt to trace a line from networks created by artists as artworks, to the idea of artists' organizations operating as networks, and finally to networks that support the activities of artists and their organizations and attempt to improve the professional treatment of artists and other cultural workers.

I believe it is important, even when addressing some of the mechanical or structural aspects of artist-run organizations, to remind ourselves that we are first and foremost artists, and that our decisions and postulations should stem from this basic fact.

Certainly on the subject of networks there is in fact a lot of overlap between the interests of art practices (especially as they existed at the time of the emergence of Canadian Artist-Run Centres) and technical or political requirements of a network that supports the betterment of the sector; the promotion of arts policy that effects better conditions for artists and the production of contemporary art. Key to my understanding of an artist-run ethic, as we might phrase it, is the notion of *responsibility* as it applies to artists. Few would argue that artists are the key stakeholders and actors in the production of art. However, the artist's authority in the contextualization of art, which naturally extends from production, is not as well understood. Artists' organizations and their activities as well as the complementary activities of writing and teaching are key.

The era in which we principally see the emergence of artist-run organizations is (perhaps not coincidentally) also a time when we witness experimental practices that use communication as both subject and form. In Vancouver, these practices emerged in part through the influence of Marshal McLuhan at the 1965 Festival of Contemporary Arts. McLuhan influenced the collaboration between Iain and Ingrid Baxter known as the N.E. Thing Company and also a collective of artists known as Intermedia that was established in 1967.

Writing on N.E.Thing Company, for Vancouver Anthology, Nancy Shaw describes the importance of these ideas to the Baxters' practice:

> Much of the Baxters' work involved experimentation with information technologies that was partly McLuhanesque, and partly a way of inhabiting corporate structures. This experimentation led to their involvement in conceptual art practices that centered around notions of the 'dematerialization' of the art object and the 'decentralization' of power through information networks. The geographic isolation of Vancouver in relation to the major art centres in the U.S. and in Europe was no longer a problem, and in fact became an asset to the Baxters. As Iain said: "You can penetrate structures using communications. But that can only happen when you're somewhere else. Because if you're there, you don't penetrate, you're just . . .You're already in it." On another occasion, he remarked that, "because [I lived] so far away, I really forced myself into dealing with the problem of information and sending it."[1]

In 1973, French Fluxus artist Robert Filliou visited Canada and the United States for a project he titled *Research on the Eternal Network*. The Eternal Network was a concept he and artist George Brecht had developed following the closing of their *"non-shop," the Cédille qui Sourit*, located in a small fishing village in the south of France and in existence from 1965-68. Filliou describes the network in a document called *Research on the Eternal Network*:

1. *Poincaré (died 1912) is said to have been the last research mathematician to know all the mathematics of his time. Minimum information on topflight modem mathematics would require a book of at least 2,000 pages, more than any one living mathematician could comprehend.*
2. *Replace 'mathematician' by 'artist'; 'mathematics' by 'art' (but whom to replace Poincaré by?).*
3. *If it is true that information about and knowledge of all modern art research is more than any one artist could comprehend, then the concept of 'avant-garde' is obsolete. With incomplete knowledge, who can say who is in front and who ain't?*
4. *I suggest that considering each artist as part of an Eternal Network is a much more useful concept. Here is a definition of the Eternal Network developed by George Brecht and myself out of a proposition* (La Fete Pemanente) *running through Teaching & Learning as Performing Arts:*
   There is always someone asleep and someone awake; Someone dreaming asleep, someone dreaming awake; Someone eating, someone hungry; Someone fighting, someone loving; Someone making money, someone broke; Someone travelling, someone staying put; Someone helping, someone hindering; Someone enjoying, someone suffering; Someone indifferent; Someone starting, someone stopping. The Network is Eternal (Everlasting)
5. *Now how do you react to it? To the suggestion that nowadays the Eternal Network is more useful than the avant-garde, I mean?*[2]

Filliou's model of the Eternal Network quickly captured the imagination of local artists, and soon developed into an umbrella term to describe a wide range of activity including correspondence art, video exchange, performance, and telecommunication arts. As Keith Wallace reminds us in his essay *A Particular History: Artist-run Centres in Vancouver*, Vancouver artist-run centres didn't gravitate principally to gallery spaces until the late seventies to early eighties. Centres such as the Western Front, Video Inn, and Women in Focus acted principally as production and dissemination centres. Wallace writes:

> *This…network was bolstered by the incorporation of ANNPAC in 1976. As a new national support system, it lessened the reliance of artist-run centres on other art institutions, which at the time appeared to be losing interest in promoting experimental art.*[3]

ANNPAC was the Association of National Non-Profit Artist Centres. As ANNPAC's monthly magazine and newsletter, editor Barbara Shapiro states:

> *ANNPAC was incorporated in February 1976, making official an already existing association of Canadian art centres commonly referred to as "Parallel Galleries", a term once defining a particular group of galleries funded by The Canada Council Visual Arts Department, and now loosely applied to any "alternative art centre". The term has always been somewhat of a misnomer, for the centres are neither 'galleries' in the traditional sense, nor do they run 'parallel' to any existing institutional art system. Each centre operates rather as an artistic complex, supporting new art in all disciplines- each incorporating the functions of exhibition gallery, performance space, audio-visual centre and forum for artists and the public. Some support archives, studios and production (print, video, audio) work. Together they form not a parallel line, but a communication system, a multi-directional exchange, a 'Network'.*[4]

Shapiro goes on further to describe principles that "…every centre retains its particular identity, characterizing the specific community to which it responds (geographic and cultural) and the individual interests of its artist-directors."[5]

However, on a policy level, it is clear that ANNPAC had a strong agenda in establishing minimum professional standards. The first retrospective, published only a year after ANNPAC had formed, features essays that served to chronicle practice, and thereby provide important documentation on which government support might be developed or expanded. Ten years later, however, the number of artist-run centres in Canada had grown exponentially, and the centralized structure of ANNPAC was having difficulties adapting to the needs of this expanded network and its divergent interests. Tensions within the organization built over a number of years and finally led to the organization's demise in 1993, triggered at last by a feeling of alienation among Quebec centres as well as the failure of an important diversity initiative. Numerous centres withdrew their membership, leaving a much-reduced network that dissolved soon after.

In the absence of ANNPAC, three provincially-based associations that had formed in the mid-to-late-eighties continued to do the bulk of advocacy and lobbying in Canada. These were the Pacific Association of Artist Run Centres (PAARC), based in the province of British Columbia; The Artist Run Centres and Collectives of Ontario (ARCCO) and Le Regroupement des centres d'artistes autogérés du Québec (RCAAQ).

Living in Vancouver, PAARC is the organization I know the best. PAARC's strength is based on two simple premises: we meet monthly and we share information with each other. We collaborate with other networks and organizations when appropriate. We also feel, collectively I think, that we are important stakeholders in cultural production and cultural institutions.

In 2002, ARCCO organized a conference titled *Convergences* that re-broached the subject of a Canadian organization to speak on behalf of artist-run centres across the country – especially important for the seven of ten provinces that were without any form of umbrella or advocacy group.

Members of PAARC greeted this prospect somewhat warily, and other centres across the country felt similar trepidations about a potential return to the overly-centralized voice of ANNPAC. From PAARC's perspective, a centralized advocacy organization carried the risk that we might abdicate our strong voice on national matters. Our challenge, then, was to create a network that allowed room for the regionally-based organizations to continue to speak to a broad set of issues, and collaborate across a national network where our views had resonance and where we saw consensus. In one respect, the model resembled an institutional version of Filliou's Eternal Network, wherein no one organization holds the whole key to the network.

This model was put to the test in 2004 after the Canada Council Visual Arts section announced it would be tying all artist grants to confirmed exhibition opportunities in order to cut the number of their applications and improve, statistically at least, their funding success rates. This announcement, made early on a Sunday morning in Vancouver, caught the attention of the few of us that were present. We quickly drafted a letter outlining the flaws of this proposal and disseminated it across the country. By the time Council officers had finished their national tour, they had met enough opposition to the proposal to cause them to abandon that criterion for Research and Creation grants.

ARCA, the Artist Run Centres and Collectives Conference formed in principle in 2004 after the *InFest* symposium in Vancouver, and was incorporated in 2005. The basic tenets of the organization is that it will act as a coalition of regionally-based associations (of which there are seven) and also allow for other caucuses and associations that span geographical regions (currently there are two: a pan-geographic association of aboriginal artist-run centres, and an association of francophone centres located outside of the province of Quebec). Under this model, ARCA supports activity from the ground up, intending to foster a network that is both resilient and diverse.

With support from the Canada Council, ARCA maintains a budget with which it can pay for a staff director position and allow the board of directors (representatives of the member organizations) to meet twice a year. Telephone meetings occur monthly. Many of ARCA's activities are outsourced to member associations for production. These include a biennial national conference produced on a rotating basis around the country (recently the Res-Artis conference in Montreal, and next year PAARC will produce an international conference titled *Institutions by Artists* in Vancouver. Other funds support a public directory of artist run centres produced by the RCAAQ every two years. Smaller amounts are directed towards initiatives such as our recent national review of wages and projects such as Arcpost.org, a research portal for artist run organizations around the globe.

So where to from here? Well, I'd like to bring us back to the idea of the artwork, and point out that while these larger coalitions are politically useful, we need the smaller fragments of the network to help shape policy that supports the diversity and nuance artist run culture hinges on. When we describe the need for artists to be paid fair compensation for the exhibitions they produce, for example, that understanding needs to come from artists themselves and filter upwards through the network. We need the incompleteness of the Eternal Network. While the Canadian Arts Coalition might make windfalls on the funding level (we hope), organizations like ARCA or PAARC need to continue to fight for the particular interests of artists and artist-run organizations and to do so from the perspective of fostering centres as artworks unto themselves; as laboratories, studios, or other places of experimentation.

We also have an opportunity here to expand our networks laterally – to maintain international networks so as to understand the broad range or artist run organizations and foster a variety of practices. To this end, I propose we formalize an international association of associations – to extend the *Eternal Network* of artists' organizations. Maybe this is a conversation we can take up at

the *Institutions by Artists* conference in Vancouver in October of 2012? I would look forward to that conversation.

Sincerely,
Jonathan Middleton

Jonathan Middleton is an interdisciplinary artist and curator based in Vancouver.

Notes

1 Shaw, Nancy. "Expanded Consciousness and Company Types: Collaboration Since Intermedia and the N.E. Thing Company." *Vancouver Anthology (2nd Edition)*. Vancouver: Talon Books, 2011. pp.99-100.

2 Filliou, Robert. "Research on the Eternal Network." *Robert Filliou: From Political to Poetical Economy*. Vancouver: Morris And Helen Belkin Art Gallery (UBC), 1995. p.8.

3 Wallace, Keith. "A Particular History: Artist-Run Centres in Vancouver." *Vancouver Anthology (2nd Edition)*. Vancouver: Talon Books, 2011. 36.

4 Shapiro, Barbara. "Forward." *Parallelogramme Retrospective 1976-1977*. Montreal: ANNPAC, 1977. p.6.

5 Shapiro, Barbara. "Forward." *Parallelogramme Retrospective 1976-1977*. Montreal: ANNPAC, 1977. p.6.

We Are Here – A view from the UK

Lois Keidan

For the *We Are Here* symposium I was invited to consider whether it is important that artist networks are formalized, how they can be sustained over time, and the significance of interdisciplinarity and artist-led exchange.

These are some of the things I said via Skype on the day.

The Live Art Development Agency was set up in 1999 in response to the proliferation of Live Art in London and across the UK. Over the years we've both responded to, and, we are told, impacted upon, the increasingly influential nature of Live Art practices by developing an extensive portfolio of specialized resources, professional development initiatives, and curatorial and publishing projects; and by working strategically, in partnership, and in consultation with practitioners and organisations in the cultural sector.

The Agency houses a unique open-access research library; runs Unbound, the world's only dedicated online shop for Live Art books, DVDs and limited editions; develops models of artistic and professional development, dialogue and debate; contributes to research culture, knowledge transfer and pedagogy; and develops inventive ways of increasing access to, and engagement with, Live Art through programming and publishing projects.

The Live Art Development Agency was set up in response to the proliferation of Live Art in the UK, and most of our work is driven and informed by artists, whilst also trying to negotiate the representation and contextualization of Live Art within institutional contexts. In this sense one of our roles is a kind of brokerage between artists and institutions.

In the UK, Artist Led Initiatives (ALIs) usually evolve out of necessity because something needs to be done that those charged with cultural responsibilities aren't doing, or aren't doing in ways they should or could, or simply because there are gaps in provision that need to be plugged. Of course in most contexts beyond Europe, North America, and Australia, ALIs are not an alternative to institutional support, but are the *only* support structures for artists working in Live Art. In China, for example, it's difficult to think of any institutional or formal context for the support of Live Art.

ALIs are about giving autonomy, voice, and decision-making powers to makers. ALIs can create opportunities and contexts where they haven't existed before. ALIs are practice led, non-bureaucratic, democratic, fluid, flexible, informal, engaged, and responsive all the benefits that come with communities of like-minded people working together to effect change. ALIs can take a lead on ethical issues, particularly around fundraising, in ways that seem to be challenging for big institutions. (Who you allow yourself to take money from is a critical issue in the UK right now, best illustrated by the activities of Liberate Tate – a group of artists-activists running creative campaigns to persuade Tate and its supporters to drop their sponsorship deal with British Petroleum).

"In this environment, experimentation and freedoms exist that offer artists and audiences something that is often not found in established institutions where funding agendas and institutional policies can set constraints on activity." [1]

But of course ALIs face huge challenges to their security and sustainability – maintaining momentum and energy can be incredibly difficult and is often at the expense of the 'lead' artists' own practices. As a consequence, ALIs can be fragile and short-lived endeavors. But sometimes that can be a good thing; they can be flash-fires that ignite others, or a burst of energy that is a catalyst for wider change.

I'm not so interested in dichotomies between institutions and ALIs. Rather, I believe that it should be a case of mutual respect and understanding of each others' roles and possibilities. ALIs can take risks and offer things like the development of artists, contexts and discourses that are often inconceivable for institutions, whilst institutions can offer platforms and profiles and momentums that are inconceivable for ALIs to achieve. Dialogue and exchange between institutions and ALIs are essential and I hope this is a key role the Live Art Development Agency (and others) can play in the formation of our culture.

I believe that artist-to-artist exchanges must exist outside of institutional frameworks, and thankfully technology now makes this possible in ways that were previously inconceivable. Technology has changed so much for Live Art over the last decade, but that's a whole other conference! As the artist/facilitator Keith Khan says in the publication *Programme Notes,*[2] "the kind of public interface that technology gives means that even work that is 'minority' on a local level can reach 'majority' audiences globally who are interested in the same ideas." The fact that I was able to contribute to the *We Are Here* symposium via Skype and that there are so many dialogues and exchanges between artists in Australia and UK reflects this global interconnectedness. The UK theatre company Forced Entertainment always used to say that they had more in common with theatre companies in Poland than in the studio next door, and technology now exists for these to be real rather than aspirational relationships. The significance of these dialogues and exchanges is simply that they are practice and idea led. Far too many official cultural exchange schemes between the UK and countries such as China and Brazil are led by diplomacy or trade. Artist-led exchanges on the other hand are all about shared values.

But I'd always be wary of too much formalizing of any artist led operation. Formalizing is a kind of institutionalizing, and the more formal something becomes the more it means that someone has to run the thing and set up rules of engagement – always the beginning of the end for creative freedom!

I'd like to close with brief introductions to three exceptional UK artist led initiatives and encourage you to undertake further research into their work. Each is pioneering new approaches to ideas of collaboration and space, and they are very much making their presence felt in the UK.

They are: The Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home in Liverpool;]performance s p a c e [in East London; and Forest Fringe in Edinburgh (and beyond).

i) The Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home

The Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home is a base for intervention where the base itself is also part of the intervention. It was set up in 2008 by the artists, activists and family unit twoaddthree who are Gary Anderson, Lena Simic and their three children Neal, Gabriel and Sid. The Institute was set up to coincide with the Liverpool 08 European Capital of Culture, or what they have come to call Culture of Capitalism, C®apital of Culture or even Capital(ism) for Vultures.

The Institute is run out of a council property bedroom in Everton, Liverpool as a space for dissenting the Capitalism of Culture. The Institute hosts events, residencies and conversations and is interested in homemade aesthetics, the private/the public, the familial, class and money matters. Its running budget is 10% of twoaddthree's combined annual net income, which includes two lectureship salaries, some freelance work, tax credits and child benefit. The Institute is committed to financial transparency and all events are free for audiences.It is open to visits, proposals for projects, performances, discussions, screenings, residencies, exhibitions, actions and presentations.

http://twoaddthree.org/

ii)]performance s p a c e [

]performance s p a c e [is an artist led non-profit organisation that provides studio and project space. It is different from conventional studio space in its approach and set up, as each studio artist has a desk, use of a large communal flux space (3,000 sq foot), access to an extensive performance library and technical equipment. It aims to cultivate live work that critically and physically pushes the boundaries of body and space. It is a place where work can unfold without restraints of curation, duration or space, and is committed to supporting challenging and difficult work that embraces performance art as an ever-evolving medium.

The ethos of]performance s p a c e [is that it's good to work together, sharing information and resources, and engaging in critical discussion about each others' practice. The studio space addresses an interest in and the necessity of the work between events and pieces, its open-plan layout across two floors encouraging dialogue between works and people. It strives to act as a hub or home to national and international artists in transit, developing the performance art network, a supportive community, and acting as a place of research and dissemination outside mainstream education and gallery structures. The space is also used for workshops, exhibitions and events, providing all studio artists the opportunity to organise and realise their own projects. Studio space is available on a rolling monthly basis to develop a core community of studio artists and to widen the performance network.

http://www.performancespace.org

iii) Forest Fringe

Led by Andy Field and Deborah Pearson, Forest Fringe began in 2007 as an independent, not-for-profit space in the midst of the annual Edinburgh Festival. Forest Fringe broke the mould of the Edinburgh Festival Fringe by offering a free space for artists to present experimental performance, and an exciting programme of work that was free for audiences to see. Since 2007, Forest Fringe has become one of the most critically and popularly acclaimed Festival venues and has spread to presenting programmes at other leading UK festivals such as Latitude.

"We sought to build a community around this space in which experimentation and adventure were cherished and supported. A space that offered artists and audiences alike a different kind of opportunity; the chance to come together collectively, contributing their time and energy to make exciting, improbable, spectacular things happen; the kind of things that none of us could have achieved individually.

In the breathless, unpredictable years since then we've tried to embed these values in everything we've done. We've continued to return to Edinburgh every

year, each time looking to experiment with different ways of doing things and new contexts to accommodate even the most unusual experiences. Meanwhile we've also started exploring beyond the Festival, creating new collaborative projects up and down the country, and year-round events such as our Travelling Sounds Library.

In all this we try and serve as a bridge, finding imaginative ways to connect the country's most innovative performance artists and theatre-makers with new audiences, new supporters and new contexts for their work. For us, Forest Fringe remains an experiment, a creative project that we hope is defined by the same kind of adventurousness and unpredictability that we so love in the artists we work with." Andy Field and Deborah Pearson.

http://www.forestfringe.co.uk/

Lois Keidan is the Director and co-founder of the Live Art Development Agency, London. www.thisisliveart.co.uk

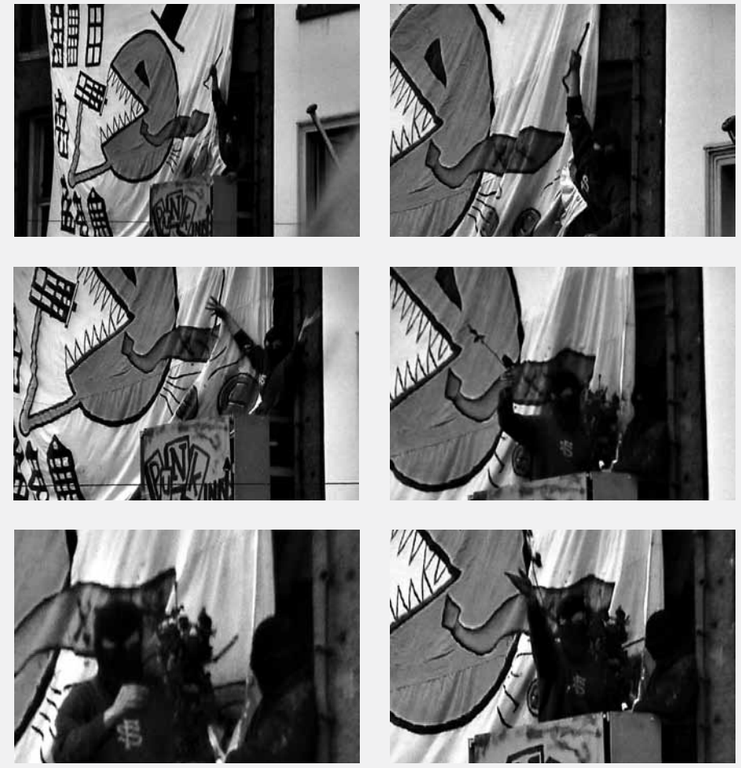
Notes

1 From *The Good, The Bad and the... Exploring Artist-led Activity and its Impact on the Live Art Landscape* written by The Bluecoat and New Work Network for *In Time: a Collection of Live Art Case Studies*. Published in 2010 by the Live Art Development Agency and Live Art UK. In Time was designed to represent some of the innovative and pioneering ways in which Live Art has both posed and responded to many of the exciting cultural challenges of our times. Each case study was directed by members of Live Art UK, using either their own work or the work of others as its focus. *In Time* can be purchased at: http://thisisunbound.co.uk/index.php?main_page=product_book_info&products_id=264 or downloaded for free from: http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/projects/lauk/In%20Time.html

2 *Programme Notes, Case studies for locating experimental theatre*. Published by the Live Art Development Agency in 2007. *Programme Notes* is a publication about furthering dialogues and collaborations between the theatrical mainstream and artists from the independent sector. *Programme Notes* can be purchased at: http://thisisunbound.co.uk/index.php?main_page=product_book_info&products_id=159

We Are Here

Zanny Begg



I was asked to make a few comments to help frame a discussion on art, radicality and activism for the *We Are Here* symposium. The panel included a diverse range of inspiring speakers: Jeff Kahn; Deborah Kelly; Richard Bell; and Nancy Mauro-Flude; whose work offers a multiplicity of ways in which we could conceptualise the connection between politics and art. Rather then even attempt to outline these different nuances in my introductory comments, I thought it might be more useful to look more broadly at the power of the word 'and' that links our understandings of art *and* politics.

When thinking about this small word I was reminded of some comments by Susan Kelly when she wrote, "The co-ordinating conjunction 'and' is not an inclusion mechanism, a random stringing together, or a series of contextual filiations. It is rather a modality of the between that produces temporary alliances between practices and 'fields"'. Thus the 'and' between art and politics can be viewed as a deterritorialising device that destabilises relationships between the two, inviting us to think about art and the world differently.

To help clarify the importance of this linking word 'and' I asked the audience to consider two quotes on the subject of politics and art. The first comes from an interview with Jean-Luc Goddard when he was discussing his 1972 film *Tout Va Bien*. *Tout Va Bien* was made after the tumult of Paris 1968 and

explored the disillusion of love, art and politics in the aftermath of an event (as conceptualized in the Badiouian sense). When Goddard was asked about making such a strong political statement in his work, he responded that his goal was not to make a political film but "to make films politically".

I think this distinction frees us as artists from much of the baggage associated with political art. If we set out to make political work we immediately confront a barrage of issues; not least of which is the problem that all works of art, even the most minimalist painting, could be considered political by the very process of its creation and/or presentation. But if we make art 'politically' we are offered a more inviting choice of considering how our work will be situated within the cannon of art. What process and materials shall we use? With whom shall we collaborate? What forms shall the work take? Where shall it exist? Who will be its audience? These questions *a priori* frame the process of making art and, as much as the content of the work, help shape its politics.

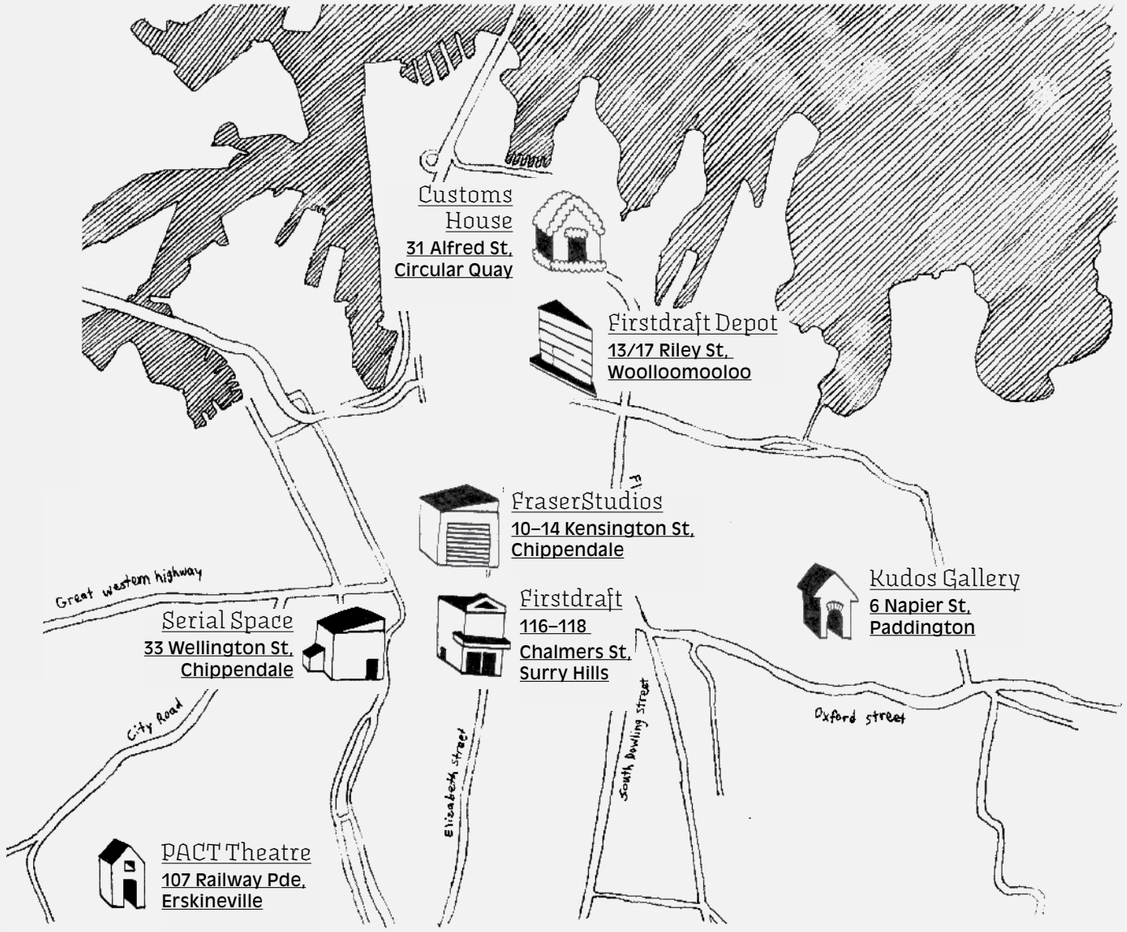
The second quote comes from Theodore Adorno when he was discussing the question of the avant-garde in *Aesthetic Theory*. Theodor Adorno positioned the role of art as the, "world once over, as like it as it is unlike it"; on the one hand it confronts society "autonomously" and on the other it is in "itself social". The radicality of art, therefore, cannot be reduced to its connection to social or political imperatives alone, but must also be understood through its *poietic* force; its ability to question and destabilise the very notion of the political, social, cultural and artistic. For Adorno, understanding art entirely through the framework of politics would emasculate its true radicalism by diminishing the ability of art to be radical on its own terms.

For Adorno the destructive promise of art is that it "seeks refuge in its own negation, hoping to survive through its death". From this perspective, the notion of the 'new' is not a fetishising of the novel or innovative but the struggle of art to continually emerge from its own artistic tradition.
The avant-garde is a highly contested concept and this is not the place to address that complex discussion. But what I hope we can take from it is an understanding of the power of that linking word 'and'. Adorno urges us to understand the radicalism of art as working against the grain of both art *and* politics at the same time, remaking how we understand art and see the world.

I hope these two quotes provide a way of conceptualizing a link between politics and art that opens up possibilities for artists to engage with the history of art making and their own practice *as* they engage with the world. We live in a world beset with extreme social and environmental problems; the issues that artists could engage with are multiple and dangerous. Responding to these challenges remains important for artists who wish to make work that responds in any serious way to the zeitgeist of our time. My invitation is to think 'politically' about politics *and* art and to see this as a challenge for both of the concepts linked by the word 'and'.

Zanny Begg is the Director of Tin Sheds Gallery, The Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning, The University of Sydney.

Images on previous page: Nancy Mauro-Flude [1975-], *"Resist", she said.* Screenshot digital C print, Requiem to the Punk Rockin squat in Amsterdam; A study of dramatic form used in so called 'street riot', a superb performance intervention, which made direct references to popular contemporary game-culture. Images courtesy of the artist.



WAH Locations:

Exhibition launch
8 – 6pm Thursday
1 September 2011

Freedman Opening
10.30 – 12.30pm
Friday 2 September 2011

The Business of Coming Together
1 – 4pm Friday
2 September 2011

Official Launch
6 – 8pm Friday
2 September 2011

Party
Friday night
2 September 2011

We Are Here Symposium
10am – 6pm
Saturday & Sunday
3 – 4 September 2011

Symposium dinner
7 – 10pm Saturday
3 September 2011

ARIs in Sydney

Alaska Projects
Level 2 of the Kings Cross Car Park
9A Elizabeth Bay Rd Elizabeth Bay
alaskaprojects.com

Anyplace – PSH gallery
118 Terry St, Rozelle
anyplaceprojects.com

Articulate
497 Parramatta Road, Leichhardt
articulate497.blogspot.com

At the Vanishing Point
565 King Street, Newtown
atthevanishingpoint.com.au

Bill and George
1/10-16 William St, Redfern
billandgeorge.org

Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative
55 - 57 Flood St, Leichhardt
boomalli.com.au

Chalkhorse
8 Lacey Street, Surry Hills
chalkhorse.com.au

China Heights
3/ 16-28 Foster St, Surry Hills
chinaheights.com

Db
19 Phelps Street, Surry Hills
dbproject.squarespace.com/about

Ded Space Gallery
Bldg 15, Sydney College of the Arts
Balmain rd, Rozelle

Eastern Bloc Gallery
138 Evans St, Rozelle
easternblocgallery.com

ESP projects
228 Illawarra Rd, Marrickville
esprojects.com.au

Factory 49
49 Shepherd St, Marrickville
factory49.blogspot.com

Firstdraft
116-118 Chalmers St., Surry Hills
firstdraftgallery.com

Gaffa
281 Clarence Street, Sydney
gaffa.com.au

Gallery A.S.
gallery.as

Gallery Eight
12 Argyle Place, Millers Point
galleryeight.com.au

I.C.A.N
15 Fowler St, Camperdown
icanart.wordpress.com

INDEX
60 Hutchinson Street, St. Peters
indexspace.com.au

International Noise
Suite N, Building C,
13 Joynton Ave, Zetland
facebook.com/group.
php?gid=125446360823531&ref=ts

Kudos
6 Napier St, Paddington
kudosgallery.wordpress.com

Mils Gallery
5 Randle St, Surry Hills
milsgallery.com

Monstrosity Gallery
93 Bourke St, Woolloomooloo
monstrositygallery.wordpress.com

MOP
2 / 39 Abercrombie St, Chippendale
mop.org.au

PACT
107 Railway Parade, Erskineville
pact.net.au

The Paper Mill
Ash St, Shop 2, 1 Angel Pl, Sydney
thepapermill.org.au

Paper Plane Gallery
727 Darling St, Rozelle
paperplanegallery.com

Peloton
25 Meagher Street, Chippendale
peloton.net.au

Serial Space
33 Wellington St, Chippendale
serialspace.org

SLAMstudio
859 South Dowling Street, Waterloo
slamstudiosydney.com/home.html

Slot
38 Botany Rd, Alexandria
slot.net.au

SNO
Level 1, 175 Marrickville Road,
Marrickville
sno.org.au

Society
6 Botany Rd, Alexandria

Spiral Gallery Cooperative Ltd
47 Church Street, Bega
thebegavalley.org.au/spiralgallery.html

SuperKaleidescope
superkaleidoscope.com

55 Sydenham Road
55 Sydenham Rd, Marrickville
55sydenhamrd.com

Tap Gallery
278 Palmer St, Darlinghurst
tapgallery.org.au

Terminus Projects
terminusprojects.org

Tortuga Studios
31 Princes Highway, St Peters
tortuga.asn.au

The Ultimo Project
Bldg 24&15, 142 Addison Road,
Marrickville
ultimoprojectstudios.blogspot.com

We apologise if we have missed anyone and if so, please let us know!

Thank you to all the WAH speakers, writers, audience and supporters

Speakers Facilitators Writers

Reze Afisina (Indonesia)
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Zanny Begg
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Blood and Thunder
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Cake Industries
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Sam Chester
Edward Colless
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Jana Hawkins-Andersen
Tanija Parker
Tesha Jeffress
Lou Stefanel
Firstdraft alumni
– especially 2009-10 directors:
Connie Anthes
Debbie Pryor
Kate Scardifield
Jessica Tyrrell.

Laurence and Kathy Freedman
Richard Manner & Bec Dean
– at Performance Space
Aaron Clarke & Carl Greenham
– at Carriageworks
Kenzie Larsen and Cab Sav collective
ARC at COFA
all at Serial Space
Kudos
Cat Jones and Michael Brown at PACT
Artsupport
Electra Frost
– Taxation and Accounting Services
The Red Room Company
Arts Law Centre of Australia
Museum and Galleries NSW
Artspace

Insert enclosed is an issue of *YOU* by Luke Sinclair, 2011.

About NAVA

The National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) is the national peak body for the visual and media arts, craft and design sector working through advocacy and service provision, to achieve a strong Australian visual arts sector and a more vibrant, distinctive and ethical cultural environment. Since its establishment in 1983, NAVA has been extremely successful in bringing about policy and legislative change to encourage the growth and development of the sector and to increase professionalism within the industry. NAVA undertakes advocacy and research, policy and project development, data collection and analysis. It also provides direct service to its members and the sector generally by setting and monitoring adherence to best practice standards and offering expert advice, referrals, resources, professional development and representation, grant programs and a range of other services.

About Firstdraft

Firstdraft is an Artist-Run-Initiative that supports the development of emerging and experimental artistic practice through diverse and innovative programs. Lead by a rotating board of 8 practising artists, Firstdraft champions and supports innovative artists, curators and writers. This support is provided through programs in four interconnected areas; exhibitions; creative and professional development; community engagement; and sustainability. Firstdraft operates two venues: a gallery in Surry Hills; and a studio complex, Firstdraft Depot, in Woolloomooloo, Sydney.

We Are Here (WAH) is a NAVA initiative in collaboration with Firstdraft.

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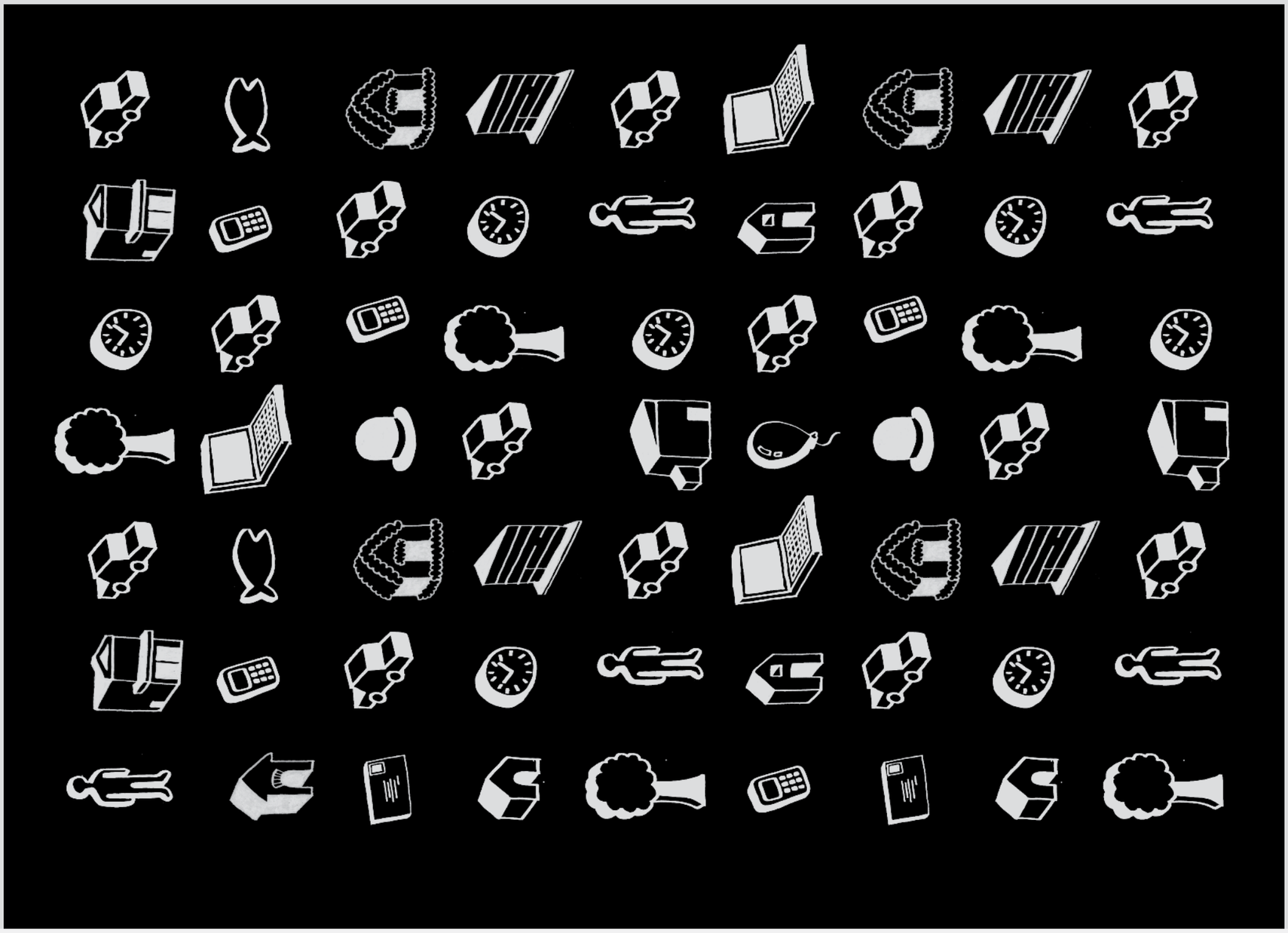


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