

In-Habit.

Jude's research notes following In-Habitants gathering April 6th 2009

Preamble:

For our April gathering, all In Habit coordinating artists were brought together in The Salon at Abbotsford Convent to discuss their first ideas for their projects exploring site/place/space and cultural exchange. The Salon is an airy, high ceiling, light filled, double room which Emilie set up with a central rectangular table for 12 and external island tables for all our different paraphernalia.

berni m janssen, Katerinna Kokkinos-Kennedy, Carl Pannuzzo, Chi Vu, Jason Maling, and Ernesto Rios were all able to attend. Mandy Nicholson sent her apologies having been involved in a car accident the day prior to our meeting (fortunately all in the car escaped injury!)

Along with the coordinating artists were Simon Howard, Emilie Collyer, Ben Dynan, and Kelly Fliedner. During lunch break Simon began some video documentation, and Carl recorded our conversation over the entire day. We brought along food to share and ate together in the sunny cloister, under the Liquid Amber.

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Until Kelly and I finish writing up our notes here are some of my condensed research notes prompted by our getting together to assist your ongoing research, which will provide you with, I hope, a sense of some of the common threads I'm drawing from your project descriptions.

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Exciting today was the kaleidoscope of different approaches to the subject of site/place/space and HOW cultural exchange might be elicited through each project. And whilst most were starting points in theory (or design), many of the questions that arose (and many thanks to those who contributed thoughts and questions from around the table) went to the very core of each of our practices. The greater part of these questions could be linked to searching for points of connection and collision – rather like asking “which way?”, “why there?” and “how did you get here?” when provided with multiple pathways and encounters at a cross road.

Even where some artists like berni had several ideas for projects that lead them down increasingly abundant paths, or where like Jason, the language and idea had been found but the symbolic breadth of the experiment was still under a great deal of consideration, I had a strong sense that simple but important questions were emerging that would help guide and strengthen each artist's research.

The simple questions:

- What am I testing?
- Who will participate?
- What is the experience?
- What might I learn from “the other”?
- What do I offer “the other” through this project?

Is this where the cultural exchange is located?
How will my project advance our research?

We began the day with a discussion about communication. Not unusual given the two month break between gatherings. It led to how each of us approached the In Habit on-line forum, our various stances regarding electronic communication in general, when, and how much or little each of us needed to communicate. A spontaneous and light hearted discussion unfolded which interestingly had a strong influence on the direction my research took following the gathering.

These preliminary discussions about how we go about working together are not given the same central place that is provided to dialogue intended to net the catch of project ideas for consideration (and thanks to Jason for the analogy). More like a kind of hole through which conversation ebbs and flows, seemingly more about process than provocation and inviting spontaneous response, it's where our exchange as In Habit artists is also located.

So for this reason I really enjoy how these holes inform the nature of the net..."the net" indeed in this case being the operative word. But more on this and far more eloquently expressed by others in my condensed notes below...

In listening, analysing and drifting with each of your ideas and particularly in the questions that Katerina's project idea provoked - 'what is diversity?', "is this a vow or a restaurant?", "what really is the tension being explored and why is it interesting?", "What is the nature of the exchange?", "What might be enriching in the experience for both the artist and the participant?" "What is the small shift in perspective that would provide us with an answer?"- my instinct was that within the knot of discussion around Katerina's project there was a thread that could, as for a lost child, provide us with a trail through the big forest for each and every project. So it's from this knotty place that I began my research. Fortunately it's a place from which many others have sought answers and found responses. I have a Japanese curator, Japanese sociologist and Susan Sontag and a recent cultural exchange called *rapt!* to thank for the thread I've named. It's a beautiful and significant tension ("conflict" according to Sontag) that's inevitable and to be embraced in any exchange.

SOLITUDE/SOLIDARITY

The tension between solitude and solidarity or, "isolation and solidarity", as it's named in the catalogue for *rapt!* – a cultural exchange program that brought a breadth of Japanese artists to Australia to research and express their response to place and identity – is named as a core condition of exchange and connection.

From our April gathering, it seems to me that this tension is central to each project; that each proposed project contains the dialectic of solitude and solidarity inherent to exchange whether this be through the "extravagant ambiguities" of growing and cooking leeks, driving linen trucks, wrapping rice bricks, waiting at a table, mapping subcultures, listening to intervals, or a reinvented visual language.

In delving into the tension created by solitude/solidarity at the same time we touch upon the core of what it is to "be in residence", our individual research processes and how we work together, the problematic and poetics of place,

time, identity and site (genius loci), and the subconscious, humorous and paradoxical mechanism deeply at play in cultural exchange.

I have summarised and compressed the talks given from these very clever thinkers published in the rapt! catalogue. I'll leave a catalogue in our room for those who wish to have a further good read.

So what might this mean for each project?

In order to advance research and in considering how you might answer questions that were put to you at our gathering or those you posed yourself whilst talking about your project or listening to others, it could be valuable to consider your singular response in the light of how it addresses the tension of our combined desire for solitude and solidarity. It's my feeling that this could lead to some fertile discussion and the creation of poetic and wonderful experiences.

And as well...

I should add that what I'm so really enjoying in our exploration together is how our research is a passage...not an outcome that can be neatly packaged... more a place of possible and unlikely encounters...and more too on this in the notes below.

Happy reading!

On packages and passages:

From Rapt! catalogue – 2006

drawn from quotes from Hirayoshi Yukihiro - Curator – National Museum of Modern Art – Osaka, and Mango Yoshikazi Sociologist

“The aim is *not* to have everybody fully understand each other's cultures, nor to achieve a mutual understanding that will transcend cultural gaps.

The aim is to incorporate the gaps and the impossibility to understand whilst aiming to resolve such issues through dialogue in order to acknowledge what it is to ... (“inhabit”).

Hence the organisation for the project has been based on the crossing of multiple viewpoints to avoid a packaging that allows for just one interpretation and provides for a passage where what is encountered by participants is interpreted in their own way.

A city can be considered as “package and passage” –

Package = an apparatus of desire, where a variety of products and services are gathered and efficiently arranged under a (usually comprehensive) marketing plan.

Package = meeting place for the like minded in a closed / defined place.

Passage = where various apparatuses share the same time-space but are generated, multiplied, or dissolved individually and in a random manner.

Passage = chance encounters with strangers where exchange avoids creating a closed package

Areas of immersion – sub culture activities

Passages of immersion...

The City of Yarra as one's habitat and one's traces.

(the following quote is particularly pertinent to Ernesto)

"Graffiti represents the traces of one's efforts to foster a sense of belonging to a city while remaining anonymous. But many graffiti artists have a different awareness and value system about graffiti; they have different opinions which they admit and say "I have mine, he/she has his/her own". Even in community they would appear to be an "island universe", the identical awareness is not shared widely. Rather, the community members of such a milieu choose to stay anonymous in order to escape identifiable labelling. They have a sense of detachment with regard to their identity. The problem is since 2000 graffiti art has become increasingly systemised even though it has not developed under any prescribed system."

Isolation and Solidarity:

"I think comfort isolates. (...). This is why I travel a lot, because I just want to keep reminding myself that the world is full of things which are not, me".

Susan Sontag

Iida Shihoko – Curator – Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery

"In the broad sense the term "to connect" refers to relationships. Today direct "connection" is not between people but rather communication lines. The term "to connect" can be used without referring to a person on the other end. In an age where communication can take place between people who have never met, connecting with people is an easy task but can also of course produce precarious relationships.

The wish to connect with others and secure lasting relationships can also be accompanied by the urge to escape such commitments. Sontag speaks of this conflict between isolation and solidarity, and makes a relevant point in the quote above about this paradox that many of us confront. All of us require a certain distance between the people and places we encounter.

Sontag also states that the two ideal states of isolation and solidarity partially conflict each other and that each must be considered in a continuous time span. As such, these two desires should fundamentally be within moderate reach of each other and integrated together under one large condition, allowing the individual to move from one state to the other. Today however, we can "switch on and switch off". It is perhaps more accurate to say that we are becoming aware of isolation and solidarity as separate conditions, determined by whether or not we are connected to others.

The recently popular activities of "self searching" (eg blogging that maps out personal worlds or exchanging the minutiae of our lives through Facebook), though we feel as if we are connecting to society, we are in fact becoming more and more self immersed. Gathering things pertaining to daily life can appear as acts that connect individuals to the outside world, but in reality individuals are merely chewing on and verifying "their own" world.

In the genre of relational art, relationships are built through the engagement of others, the element of chance inherent in their reaction, and the communication engendered by the physical intervention of the artist.

These elements constitute the work or alternatively are heightened by their absence (as for example in Ameya Norimuzu's "Soku shin" - a Buddhist term to define a person who has attained enlightenment in a physical state – a work which concealed the artist's body obliging viewers to confront various relationships between opposites – self/other, reality/fiction, life/death, light/darkness and all the more emphasised participant's relationship to the existence of the artist who was on the other side of the wall).

First there is the self, then the other and finally, this conflict between self and the other. Generally speaking, it is only under these conditions that one feels a sense of belonging to a certain place, in other words, whether or not one has a sense of attachment.

Conversely, we might ask ourselves,
to what extent can we self define ourselves, and
how do we understand the frameworks that define us?

Quite often the desire for mutual understanding is not a "mutual" concern, but a reflection of one person's wish to have the other understand them. We may find ourselves in unsettling and frustrating situations when others do not understand us in a way that we wish them to, or when our thoughts are not thoroughly communicated or received. Yet this dissatisfaction is a healthy situation in itself, rather than the supposedly correct idea of wanting to convey one's feelings in an accurate way. "Conveyance" and "understanding" are two separate things; what is correct for oneself is not necessarily for others.

To what extent can we therefore liberate and entrust ourselves to others?

In order to be conscious of the fact that the world does not exist for "me", one must care for others who are there in the far distance, and use one's imagination to the fullest. In this age of immersion and from within an artists' "state of immersion", imagination is what awakens our adequate sense of distance. There may be discomfort or even conflict to a certain degree, but I for one believe that the existence of others is what opens the way for isolation and solidarity to co exist in this immersive age. One must still care for the fact that there is "someone out there", and continue to expand one's consciousness over distance and time in order to avoid self contained connections."

Some further questions and provocations following our April gathering.

How does the exchange within each project help me and others to

- see beyond our own limits
- grasp various phenomena occurring in City of Yarra
- acknowledge the crossing of viewpoints
- create connection and collision points

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