

**CONCRETE
CULTURE**

IVAN DOUGHERTY GALLERY
29 MAY-5 JULY 2008

ARTISTS

ALFREDO JUAN AQUILIZAN
b. 1962, Ballesteros, Cagayan, Philippines
MARIA ISABEL AQUILIZAN GAUDINEZ-AQUILIZAN
b. 1965, Manila, Philippines
Live and work Brisbane, Australia
www.janmantonart.com

RICHARD GOODWIN
b. 1953, Sydney, Australia
Lives and works Sydney, Australia
www.richard-goodwin.com

OU NING
b. 1969, Zhangjian, Guangdong, China
Lives and works Beijing, China
www.dazhalan-project.org

SQUATSPACE
Artist collective since 2001
Concrete Culture participants: Mickie Quick, Minnie Temple,
Nobody, Lucazoid, Keg Roll and Sister Joan
Live and work Sydney, Australia
www.squat-space.com

ASHOK SUKUMARAN
b. 1974, Sapporo, Japan
Lives and works Mumbai, India
<http://Out.in>

CURATOR

FELICITY FENNER

**URBAN INTERSECTIONS:
MY PLACE OR YOURS?
FELICITY FENNER**

Concrete Culture presents a range of contemporary art projects occurring at the interface of art and architecture. The exhibition is the first stage of a wider research project that examines relationships between art and architecture in rapidly evolving cities, revealing how Asian and Australian art can engender community, regional and international dialogue.

This first exhibition has been conceived as a collection of interventions and documentations by artists living and working in Australia and Asia whose practice explores intersections between public and private spaces. These five artists and collaborators have been selected on the basis of their long-term engagement with the urban environment as artists, activists and in their everyday lives, on projects that can be personal, political, or both. The exhibition does not contain singular works, but elements of ongoing projects to which the artists have been committed over a number of years.

Linking the research and practice of the artists in *Concrete Culture* is their focus on the impact of change on their immediate environments. Richard Goodwin's performative expeditions into fortified city skyscrapers probe the covert barriers that protect and prohibit, while Ashok Sukumaran employs as material and metaphor a shared utility – light – to transgress the boundaries between public and private spaces, wealthy and poor communities. Ironically, it is the lack of concrete, here symbolising a lack of certainty, that imbues with heartache the house of possessions built by Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan. The artists recently emigrated from the Philippines to Brisbane, their world adrift as they reassessed and redefined their material and cultural heritage in the context of a new city and culture.

Gerard Reinmuth notes here in relation to Richard Goodwin's work that "two of the most critical issues regarding urban development – the cannibalisation of the public realm by private organisations and questions of a sustainable future – are addressed directly here". Indeed, there is a clear imperative by all the artists in *Concrete Culture* to scrutinise and record those aspects of urban and cultural change that disseminate local communities and devastate people's sense of place. In particular, the ongoing *Da Zha Lan* project being undertaken by Chinese artists Ou Ning and Cao Fei and SquatSpace's subversive yet enlightening *Tour of Beauty* offer creative responses to the politics of space and gentrification in working class areas of Beijing and Sydney.

Concrete Culture evolves from research funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage grant, undertaken by Jill Bennett, Felicity Fenner, David McNeill, Xing Ruan and Thomas Berghuis at the UNSW's Centre of Contemporary Art and Politics. In addition to conferences and publications, in the coming two years related exhibitions will be staged by the project's partner institutions, Casula Powerhouse in Western Sydney and Zendai Museum of Modern Art, Shanghai. The series of exhibitions and other projects facilitate cross-cultural dialogue and, it is hoped, the potential for future collaborative projects between participating artists.



Alfredo and Isabel Aquiliza
Address, 2008
Installation view, 2008 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art
Photo: Saul Steed

ALFREDO & ISABEL AQUILIZAN

ALFREDO & ISABEL AQUILIZAN ADDRESSING THE BLACK HOLE HOU HANRU

The Philippines has one of the most extraordinary contemporary art scenes in the Asia Pacific region. Since the 1960s and 1970s, various experimental art movements, notably conceptual and performance groups, have thrived from the country. Numerous Filipino artists have gained international recognition: David Medalla, Judy Freya Sibayan, Marion Pastor Roches, Gerry Tan, Santiago Bose, Manuel Ocampo, Lani Maestro, Gaston Damag, among others, are familiar names in today's global art scene, while Manila and Baguio are major destinations for art researchers. Coming from a unique, multicultural, multi-religious, postcolonial and post-totalitarian background, Filipino contemporary art has always been closely related and conditioned by the intense, contradictory and often violent reality of a society in permanent transition between postcolonial political turmoil and economic development, with impacts from its complicated experiences with the global world: the Philippines has a huge Diaspora spread around the world while a part of the country was involved with the "global war on terror" long before the phrase itself was coined. This experience has made artistic expressions by artists involved with the reality radically passionate, intense, politically and emotionally engaging. However, besides the apparent expressionistic-ness, one can always sense a strong sense of community and solidarity conveyed in their discourses, activities and actual art works.

Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan, an artist couple working together for more than a decade, are among the most active and influential artists from the Philippines today. Negotiating the chaotic social reality, the complex experiences of living in and out of the country and the urgent challenges of surviving as artists and parents of a large family, they manage to transform everyday complications and difficulties into highly energetic inquiries into the significance of identity and social solidarity. These inquiries, inspired and perpetuated by the tension between the anxiety of home-ness and the excitement of embracing life on the move (from street traffic to global displacement), have been expressed in an extremely abundant and exalting, quasi celebratory form of display of everyday objects, turning their work into a kind of sanctuary of daily life. An expansive

and evasive spatialisation, merged in the ocean of constant dialogues with others via collecting and accumulating homewares from different communities, has turned their work into a melting pot of sentimentality and transcendence. They call their recent project *Be-longing*: doesn't belonging mean exactly the endlessly intriguing struggle to figure out a sense of being through the inevitable longing for the impossible of home-return, memory and aspiration? Being in the present always implies looking back to the past, but the past cannot be reconstructed. The present and the past are equally uncertain, and it's exactly this anxiety of uncertainty that generates the strongest impulse of creation.

The Aquilizans' recent settlement in Australia and the obligation to construct a new home – not only a physical house but also a new kind of home-ness, or a new communal relationship with the society – in this land of strangers, have provided them with an even more relevant opportunity and more intense energy to carry out their creative practice. This also incites a significant change in their artistic work, notably their strategy of spatialisation. In this context, art for them is a way to adapt to a new reality, to search and construct a new identity, or a new process of de-identification and re-identification.

An immediate challenge for any new immigrant is obviously about material conditions and space: what to eat, wear and use? Where to live? It's these most elementary and basic issues that provide the Aquilizans the most meaningful and efficient references and motivations to carry on with their artistic imagination and creation. Thus the artists now focus on the most essential objects and minimal spaces. The Balikabayan box, an ingenious invention of the Filipino Diaspora to stay in touch with their families, relatives, friends and "motherland", is hence adopted by the Aquilizans as an effective form of recasting their creativity and new language. The Balikabayan box, or the returnee's box, is a *bric-à-brac* collection of everyday consumer goods such as clothes, kitchenware and canned food to be brought or sent back to the Philippines by emigrants from outside. It's usually small enough to be carried on airplanes or sent by the post. Therefore,

its actual material value is much less important than its symbolic one: with a limited amount of everyday objects, it's in fact a powerful and rich reminder of the emotional and spiritual links between those in exile and those in their homes, between the floating individual and the rooted community. More interestingly, this small box always embodies the most profound contradiction and sentimental dilemma for many who are surviving at the margins of globalisation, whose home-longing actually signifies an unrealisable dream: longing is actually what they belong to, the real form of their being. And the little returnee's box as the emigrants' manifesto of home-returning, once arrived home, actually announces the news of the impossibility of the sender's homecoming!

The Aquilizans, sharing a similar destiny with those Balikabayan box senders, have appropriated this greatly inventive form of expression. In their new project *Address*, they collect hundreds of everyday objects given by friends to help them set up a new home in Australia and pack them into small boxes, each 50cm square. 140 have been prepared and stacked to form a roofless 'home', "vulnerable, open to the vicissitudes and uncertainties of dislocation and change"¹. Most remarkable is the artists' wonderful capacity to turn the most constraining conditions into the most dynamic and intensive energy and space for creation: in the small boxes, the objects are pressed into condensed forms, taking on a kind of abstract existence. It's in this process of distortion and abstraction that, all of a sudden, the most banal everyday materials are transformed into a powerful artistic form. It's like an infinite black hole that sucks everything into its unfathomable depth... Is a home for the artists, and for all of us living in the time of global displacement, a black hole? What is the address of the black hole?²

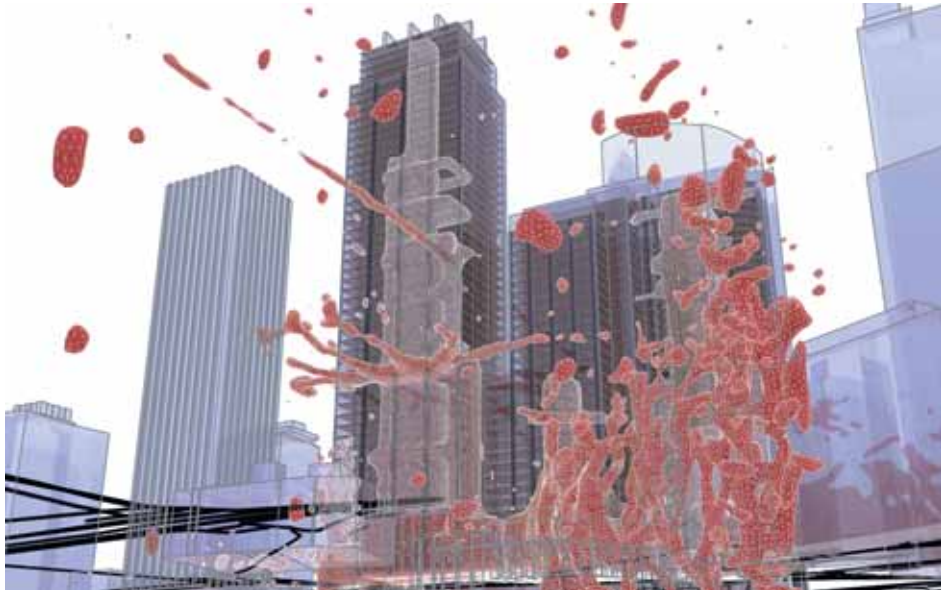
HOU HANRU is a curator of major international exhibitions, most recently the 2007 Istanbul Biennale. He is Director of Exhibitions and Public Programs and Chair of the Exhibitions and Museum Studies program at San Francisco Art Institute.



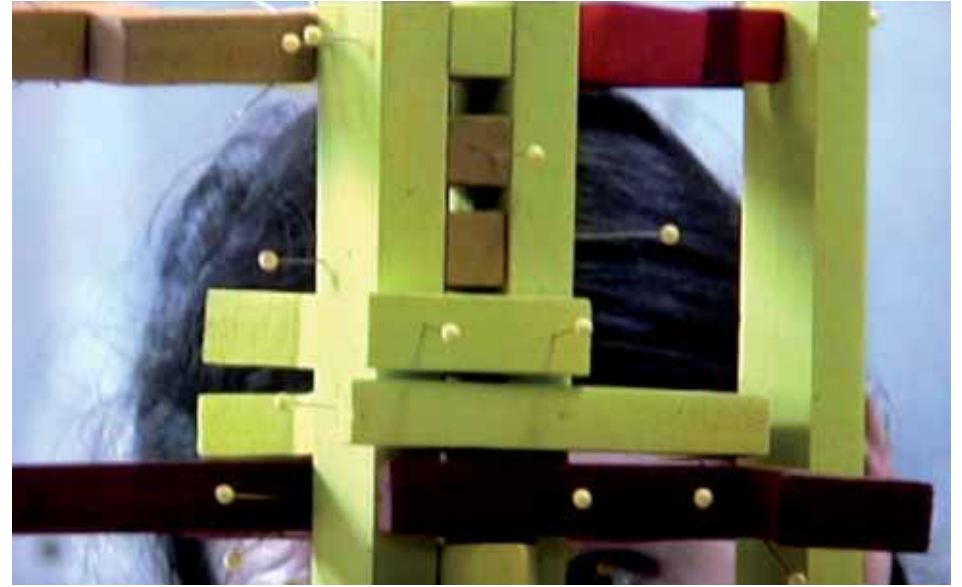
Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan
Address, 2008 (interior, detail)
Installation view, 2008 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art
Photo: Saul Steed

¹ Felicity Fenner, "Fragile State", *Handle with Care: 2008 Biennial of Australian Art*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 2008, p.23

² An edited version of this essay was published in *Handle with Care: 2008 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art*, ibid., p.26



Richard Goodwin
What a building desires, 2005



Richard Goodwin
Jenga Porosity (video still), 2005

RICHARD GOODWIN

**RICHARD GOODWIN
POROSITY
GERARD REINMUTH**

Porosity is something of a buzzword nowadays, used freely and frequently in the writings of many theorists working on the public realm. The word seems to appear in every text on urbanism and is regularly co-opted as a branding device for specific projects by practitioners such as Steven Holl and Vito Acconci.

The collective interest in and overuse of this adjective is unfortunate for Goodwin given his *Porosity* research has been in progress for some time and, in my view, is of singular significance. Goodwin's RMIT Masters in the 1990s worked through this issue: he had been using it as a means for explaining his work for some time prior to that.

However it may be that Goodwin's obsession with porosity as a framing device for his explorations has created a perceptual limitation for others when addressing the work. Given that porosity is often used in specific projects to describe a form with multiple openings – to let light in or circulation through – the concept has been significantly diminished to little more than a symbolic gesture. Further, there is a complete absence of projects that deploy the concept in a more operative manner.

Goodwin's mapping exercises reveal not so much the potentiality of a reconfigured city which has been enabled by circulation through porous surfaces, but the potential for aggressive viral conditions to effect massive organisational change. Existing buildings are subject to a form of spatial ebola, cannibalised from the inside out and then reconnected with the ever-diminishing public realm beyond. Having co-opted porosity as a frame for his research, Goodwin has pushed the idea so hard he has almost left it behind.

It is perhaps because of my status as an architect – as someone whose domain is so pervasively challenged by these propositions – that I make such strong claims for them. Having worked on large city projects – and by coincidence, extensively so on the design of 363 George Street, one of Richard Goodwin's research subjects – the potency of his interrogations registers powerfully.

These interrogations go way beyond the gentle enquiries public art usually makes of its host, for a lot is at stake here, not least of which is the potential for art to test the functional boundaries of built form. Goodwin asks existing constructions what they really want to be now they are off the drawing board and in play. This form of architectural psychoanalysis would challenge the designers of these monuments in the extreme, given the conceptual and commercial frames within which the buildings were conceived.

The paths which lead us to Goodwin's *Porosity* project are well-traversed, well-understood, and are acknowledged in his writings. The progression from Dada in the 1930s to the Situationists in the 1960s and finally to Stalker in the 1990s is a clear lineage, registering the re-appearance of similar ideas over a century or so, but with each appearance taking the research to a new level and of course contextualising it in the present.

What makes Goodwin's work so powerful and – even when compared with these previous incarnations, so profound and important – is the rigour with which Goodwin's research was undertaken and the questions which this process asks of those who attempt to organise and control the public realm.

The research component of the work consists of a series of projects – including mappings, performance, recording phenomena and finally digital mappings of all of these, in the quest to speculate on what has been uncovered. The work culminates in a series of questions. While this is inevitable given the research-based enquiry that underpins the work, it is important when trying to locate these propositions in the tradition of architects' utopian schemes. Simultaneously, the concreteness of the mappings and analysis separates Goodwin's practice from the tradition of pure performance work.

It is this comparison between the work to the other forms of art practice in which Goodwin has engaged which is particularly telling. While Goodwin is aware of the potency his work can bring to a subject when compared to

traditional architectural practice, the questions he offers to the canon of public artwork are significant and severe. Via demonstration, he is asking, “why does public artwork exist”?

Perhaps it is because of my architect's view that I find most public art deeply dissatisfying. What argument can justify the placement of works conceived within a gallery mindset into a context such as the public realm, in which complexity, power and opportunity are so present? How can a series of pretty brooches attached to the lapels of our public projects be so regularly applauded by critics? Even at their best, these brooches are commissioned in a collaborative arrangement early in the project, are carefully integrated with the architecture and might cause us to reflect on the conditions of the site and circumstance. However, even this path rarely leads to anything beyond a well-executed fetishisation of site and a resulting hyper-sentimentality in regard to place.

Goodwin's *Porosity* project takes on its context, interrogates it and then proceeds to blow it apart. At a national level I can think of nothing that comes close. Even internationally there are few – among whom Olafur Eliasson is the current artist of choice – who are exploring the transformative potential of art and research in the public realm to such a degree. Even when subject to these comparisons, Goodwin's work holds its own, for the best work of today's big name artists working in the public realm rarely approaches the political, economic and social consequences that would arise from seeing Goodwin's work put into action.

The international significance of this work is well understood and we see Goodwin's list of overseas speaking and teaching engagements expanding by the minute. Why then, is there so little interest here in what he is doing?

To answer this question is a significant essay in itself so here I can only simplify. Perhaps people just don't get it. When we consider that two of the

most critical issues regarding urban development – the cannibalisation of the public realm by private organisations and questions of a sustainable future – are addressed directly here, the lack of interest is stupefying. In regard to boundaries between the public and private realm, Goodwin's performances tested them to the limit – testing of such significance that it attracted the attention of ASIO. In regard to environmental issues, this work turns the sustainable design orthodoxy on its head, supplanting the twirling propellers and star ratings and carbon credits which signify “sustainable design” but in fact perpetuate global warming with a new form of city development. In Goodwin's new world everything that has come before continues to exist as it's augmented by new grafts and appendages to unlock new opportunities.

As a friend and sometime collaborator of Goodwin's I could be interrogated for the lack of critique in this commentary. However, I would argue that as someone who knows this work well and has watched it develop over many years, this intimacy could easily be deployed to undercut the work completely, were it possible to do so.

However, I find such criticism beyond me. The work is profound, its potential both terrifying and exciting. I can only stand in awe of how Goodwin might propel this research forward in the built realm, if only he is given the opportunity.

GERARD REINMUTH is Director of TERROIR architects and Adjunct Professor, School of Architecture, University of Technology, Sydney.



Ou Ning
Meishi Street (video still), 2005-2006



Ou Ning
Meishi Street (video still), 2005-2006

OU NING

OU NING WHEN SPACE TURNS TO PLACE THOMAS J. BERGHUIS

Ou Ning was born in 1969 in the city of Zhangjiang, at the Leizhou Peninsula on the southern tip of Guangdong Province in South China, known as one of China's ancient trade ports during the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and the Song Dynasty. In 1993 Ou Ning graduated from Shenzhen University, situated in the city of Shenzhen that forms the centre of one of China's first special economic zones (first established in 1979 as a 'special export zone') that is located on the border with Hong Kong.

In Shenzhen, Ou Ning became the driving force behind a series of events and publications, including in the music industry, starting in 1995 with his involvement in the China tour of the Japanese vocalist and artist Yamatsuka Eye and the New York avant-garde composer John Zorn, and in organising the concert in Shenzhen of Cui Jian, one of China's foremost rock-legends. During the 1990s Ou Ning stayed involved with the alternative music and arts scenes in China, taking on the role of organiser and as a designer for several significant events and publications.

From 1999 Ou Ning started to focus his attention on new developments in visual culture in China, particularly experimental filmmaking in response to the changing social and urban landscape of the Pearl River Delta area in southern China, which covers all nine prefectures of Guangdong Province (including the cities of Guangzhou, Shenzhen, and Zhuhai), as well as Macau and Hong Kong. On September 11, 1999 Ou Ning became one of the founders of the not-for-profit film organisation, U-Thèque, based in Guangzhou and Shenzhen.

The idea for founding U-Thèque arrived from the introduction of digital video in China and the opportunity to use the showroom of a digital home theatre store for weekly, Saturday-afternoon film screenings. He showed a range of films from international classics to Chinese feature films that were banned from public screening in China, as well as new, alternative productions including documentaries, experimental and short films produced by local artists and filmmakers in Guangzhou and Shenzhen. The early experimental films that were screened during the 'Independent Film Showcase', a screening that travelled to Beijing, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, and Hong Kong, included the documentary film

Forefinger (1999) by Shenzhen-based artist Jiang Zhi (b. 1971), and the short film *Imbalance 267* by Guangzhou-based artist Cao Fei (b. 1978), both of whom were early members of the U-Thèque organisation.

In recent years, both Jiang Zhi and Cao Fei have received increased international recognition for their works, which have been widely acknowledged as integral to a new generation of Chinese artists using digital media to explore rapid changes in the urban landscape of China. This new generation of artists pays increased attention to emerging urban youth cultures. At the same time, these artists operate increasingly within a collaborative framework, setting up multi-layered organisational structures that form the basis of elaborate investigations into the changing urban and social cultures of China.

The first major project that featured such collaborative aspects and offered an intricate investigation into the changing urban environment, as well as the social challenges that come with rapid urbanisation amidst major cities in China, was instigated in 2003 by Ou Ning and Cao Fei as part of a commissioned project (curated by Hou Hanru) for the 50th Venice Biennale. The project, titled *San Yuan Li*, featured a group of local filmmakers, photographers, musicians and sound artists, led by Ou Ning and Cao Fei, who conducted a comprehensive investigation into the San Yuan Li community in the city of Guangzhou. This led to the production of a series of video, sound, and text-based visual renderings of a 'village in the city', paying attention to the compound histories of the community, the challenges that face its inhabitants and its surroundings amidst processes of increased modernisation such as urban encroachments onto the traditional village structure and changes in the architectural and social framework of San Yuan Li and its people.

Following their *San Yuan Li* project of 2003, Ou Ning and Cao Fei became interested in continuing their multi-media investigations into urban village communities in other major cities across China, particularly in Beijing and Shanghai. In 2005, they received a fellowship grant from the German federal

cultural organisation, Kulturstiftung des Bundes, allowing them to embark on a project that explores the community and built environment of Da Zha Lan, a slum area located in the centre of Beijing, just southwest of Tiananmen Square between Jianmen Avenue to the east, Nan Xinhua Street to the west, Zhushikou Xi Avenue to the south and Jianmen Xi Avenue to the north.

Since 2005 the *Da Zha Lan* project has grown to include an elaborate series of documents, involving visual, sound, text and web-based research reports and documentation, covering many aspects of the community, urban environment and cultures that make up the Da Zha Lan area in Beijing. Their research centres on the historical and cultural development of the area, the ongoing soaring poverty levels and high population density that marks the area as one of the inner-city slums, as well as making visual investigations into the area's social organisation, architectural features, and the community ecology and population demography. The installation of the *Da Zha Lan* project in *Concrete Culture* featured is based on its installation at the 2007 Istanbul Biennale. It comprises a corridor of light-boxes with photographs of Da Zha Lan, accompanied by headphones that play the sounds and voices of the urban landscapes and communities that make up the area. The work provides audiences with an opportunity to reflect on notions of public space and private place, on shared experiences of community and on the ties between art, life, and the built environment.

Links: U-Thèque Organization: <http://www.u-theque.org.cn>
Da Zha Lan Project: <http://www.dazhalan-project.org>
Alternative Archive: <http://www.alternativearchive.com>
Ou Ning's Blog: <http://www.alternativearchive.com/ouning>
Cao Fei's Blog: <http://www.alternativearchive.com/caofei>

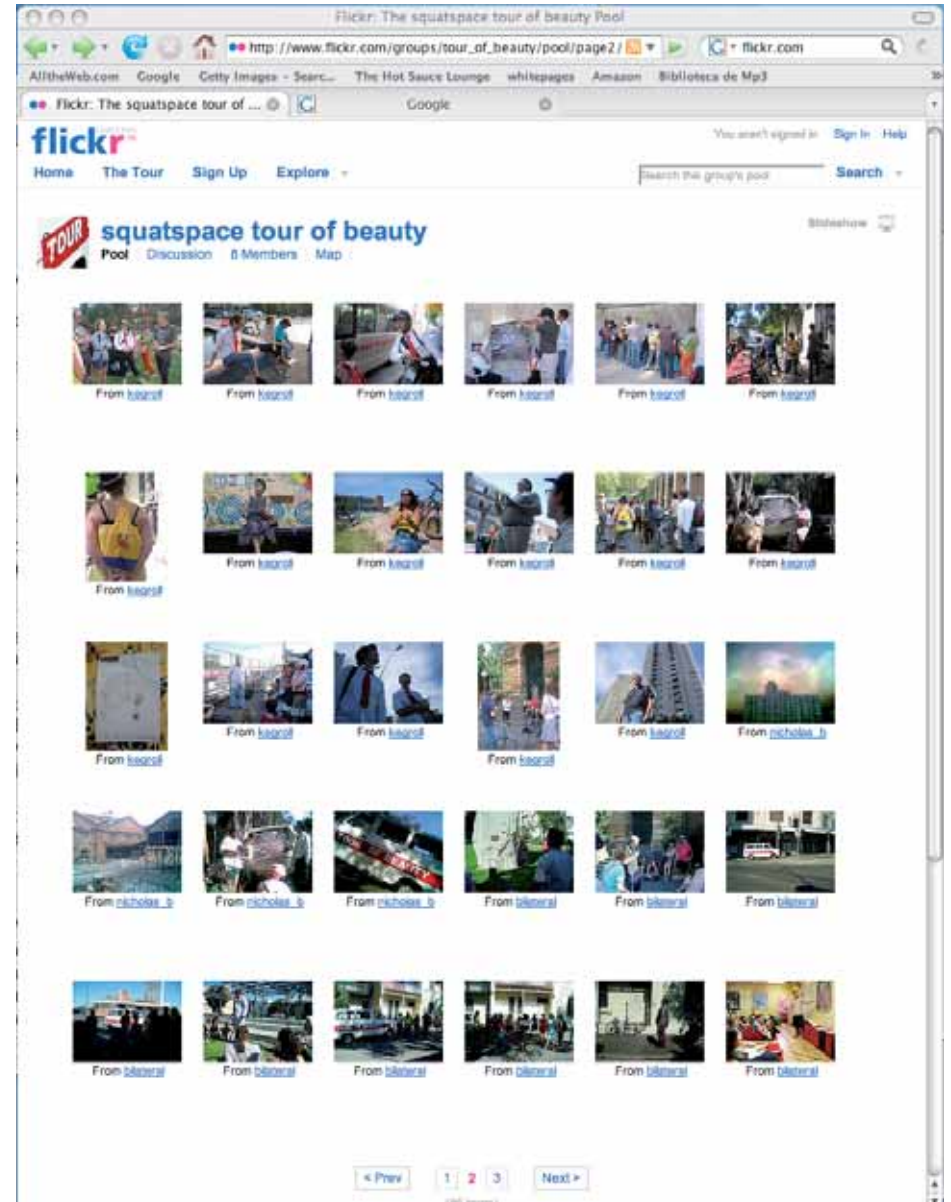
THOMAS J. BERGHUIS is Senior Research Curator, Centre of Contemporary Art & Politics, College of Fine Arts at UNSW and Casula Powerhouse, Sydney.



Ou Ning
Meishi Street (video still), 2005-2006



SquatSpace
Tour of Beauty, 2005–2006



SQUATSPACE

DIY ARCHITECTURE: SQUATSPACE AND THE TOUR OF BEAUTY ZANNY BEGG

*If I could change things here I would shoot the social engineers, all the academics, all the town planners, all the government planners, all the architects, all ivory tower dwellers who do not have any concept of what the people want and need. They just get bright ideas and then go and inflict them on the people – oh they claim to consult, to go through due process but in reality they don't... Leave us alone, let this place heal, go play social games somewhere else.*¹ Ross Smith, Redfern resident and regular *Tour of Beauty* participant, 2007.

Redfern/Waterloo has long been regarded as a "problem" area for Sydney which successive social planners, architects, academics and town planners have sought various ways to remedy, police or contain. The heart of Redfern is The Block which is home to one of Australia's strongest and most established urban Indigenous communities. But the suburb is also home to several public housing projects and various strong working class and migrant communities. The relatively low costs of rent, and the previously undeveloped nature of the suburb, means that it has traditionally been a place for students and other poorer residents to rent and, maybe for lucky low income families, to take out a mortgage. Its close proximity to the city, however, has meant that it has also been in the sights of urban planners and developers whose 'bright idea' is to transform this area into a high density cosmopolitan haven for 'city living'.

In late 2004 the NSW state government established the Redfern/Waterloo Authority (RWA) which has the specific purpose of ensuring a rapid gentrification and development of the suburb. The RWA chose nine sites for development across the area including a school, a hospital and the disused rail yards. These were to be transformed from places for study, care or work into spectacular attractions which would bring people into the suburb for leisure, entertainment and the joys of city living. Concurrent with this emphasis has been a push from developers to build new flats and high cost apartments which they hope will attract a new type of resident into the area.

The result is that Redfern has a congested and contested demography – an explosive mixture of the newer, more wealthy residents and eager homebuyers looking to cash in, the long term and more established Indigenous community

determined to stay, the Department of Housing residents hoping to hang on to their flats and a drifting community of low income renters looking for houses close to the city which are not yet renovated out of their price range.

It would be stating the obvious to say that Sydney is in the grip of a housing crisis. This affects not only first home buyers who are trying to buy their piece of the Australian dream, but also young renters and low income families who have given up on any dreams of ownership but still struggle with finding a secure place of abode. Horror stories abound of over 150 people turning up to for a rental inspection at your average run-down inner city terrace and real estate agents accepting rent auctions and other outrageous forms of competition to choose the occupants. The transformation of Redfern/Waterloo from a suburb of public housing, rental housing and low cost living to a place for urban yuppies is a microcosm of this process in the city as a whole: a strange blind post for various urban planners and government representatives who express concern over "housing issues" yet fail to connect the dots to reveal this particular picture.

It was into this congested mix that SquatSpace decided to intervene with its *Tour of Beauty* project. As longterm residents and visitors to Redfern/Waterloo, and as an art collective which grew out of the Broadway Squats (2000) and from a community with an enduring interest in the politics of space, the members of SquatSpace wanted to draw attention to some of the issues confronting this important area of Sydney. They wanted to make a work "about Redfern" but felt uncomfortable making any definitive statement about the processes taking place. The consensus: a loose, ongoing *Tour of Beauty* where SquatSpace invited local residents, activists, or people with an interest in the future of the suburb to speak about their concerns in various locations across the area. The exact mix of speakers varies each time, as do the locations visited, but some consistent themes are addressed: gentrification, democracy, community control, public housing, over-development.

One of the aims of the tour has been to create a sustainable model of art activism which creates ongoing and affective relationships between those in struggle over housing and other issues of urban space, artists and those in

¹ Interviewed in the 2016: Archive Project, artwork by Keg de Souza and Zanny Begg (www.2016archiveproject.com).

solidarity. The tour has been enormously popular both with the participants and with the local activists who have enjoyed the greater levels of community interest and support the project has generated. It was launched at the *Disobedience* exhibition at Ivan Dougherty Gallery in 2005, but its low-cost, DIY nature has meant that the tour has been able to continue without funding and independent of the museum context and has been re-run over 15 times since the original exhibition in various other contexts.

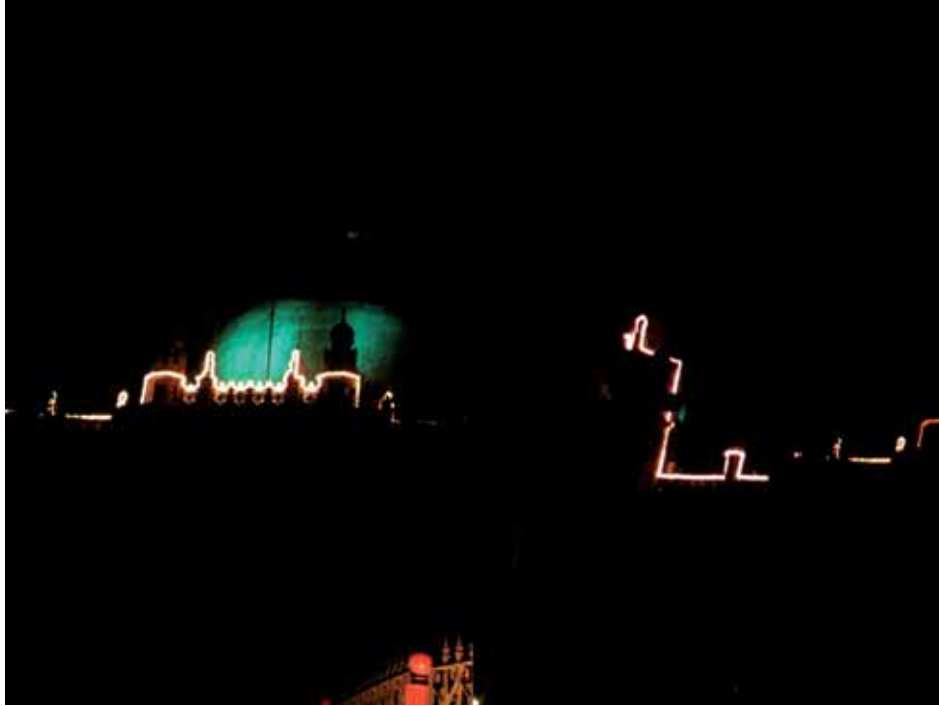
SquatSpace describes its role in this work as akin to that of DJs. They don't vet what the speakers say, or provide any sort of script through which the problem of gentrification must be explained, but they choose who speaks and in what order. Each tour is a different interaction between speakers and participants with SquatSpace members, dressed in their distinctive uniforms, helping facilitate discussion at various points along the way. The result is a hybrid mix of participation and preconstruction, open-ended and predetermined meanings. Projects such as these blur the boundaries between art and activism, audience and artwork, creating a new synthesis between culture and praxis.

The *Tour of Beauty* reverses the top-down approach of the RWA by building a bottom up picture of the suburbs of Redfern and Waterloo and the various needs and wants of its residents. It opens up (rather the closing down) channels of communication and allows a diverse picture of urban life to emerge. If we accept the French philosopher of urbanism Henri Lefebvre's idea that space is not only constructed through the buildings that enclose it, but also through the social relationships which constitute it, then the members SquatSpace are DIY architects of inner city Sydney. For the last three years they have been building a psycho-socio-geographic map of Redfern/Waterloo which captures an impression as enduring as any of the buildings which inhabit this contested site.

ZANNY BEGG is a Sydney based artist and writer.



SquatSpace
Tour of Beauty, 2005–2006



Ashok Sukumaran
Glow Positioning System (video still), 2005



Ashok Sukumaran
Glow Positioning System (video still), 2005

**ASHOK
SUKUMARAN**

ASHOK SUKUMARAN SWITCHES OF SOCIALITY NANCY ADAJANIA

The Bombay-based artist Ashok Sukumaran has periodically attempted to free electricity from its secure power grids, and to renew it as a medium and metaphor for intersubjective engagement. Sukumaran's public art projects and gallery-based artworks deploy technology as a mode of articulation, an exploration of its expressive potential. Equipped with a degree in architecture from the School of Planning and Architecture, Delhi (1993-1998) and media art from UCLA (2001-2003), he has shot arrows of light across horizons of privilege, and illuminated Bombay's skyline with an out-of-season festival of lights.

Distinctive and variable as Sukumaran's projects may seem, they are held together by three recurrences: the act of circling, the passage of the line, and the wonderment of effects rendered at a distance. These recurrences are embodied both as philosophical ideas concerning conversation and community, and as performances of address. These recurrences are not only physical gestures of mapping. By proposing continuities that span and spar with social, ethnic, regional and other divisions, they dramatise the dream of a shared social space.

But Sukumaran does not regard his production of spaces of interaction as angelic exercises, where every invitation to communicate with strangers will be rewarded with reciprocity. He is only too aware of the sudden shocks triggered by artistic proposals imposed on an unsuspecting public, the power fluctuations (in several senses) and the short circuits caused by incompatible social and economic wiring.

Sukumaran's interactive lighting work, titled *Glow Positioning System* (2005) on Mint Road, Bombay, offered passers-by the pleasure of twirling a hand-crank: a genie that started off fairy lights on the ornamental facade of the heritage structure, the General Post Office, then embraced the surrounding commercial and residential buildings with warm sprays of light. The act of circling is the act of shaping space: an inclusive device, because a circle is always a work in progress, and breaks within the circle tend to strengthen

rather than interrupt the whole. With his fictive gesture of circling by light, Sukumaran brought together the disparate activities of this mixed-use locality into the concert of neighbourhood.

In this age of fast-forward mobility, with GPS (Global Positioning System) tracking and locating our every movement on a map, *Glow Positioning System* (pun intended by the artist) attempted to sensitise us to our own vicinity, realigning our understanding of distance and proximity. Rotations of the crank produced a virtual horizon, a 360-degree panoramic landscape.

The viewers of GPS are immersed in a panorama which is not a painted landscape, but the city itself. But unlike most 19th-century panoramas that depict a landscape from elsewhere or far away, *GPS* provides what Sukumaran calls an "internal tourism". This panorama is built through a play of popular consensus and dissensus, between those who play the game and those who urge them on, between those who permitted the illumination of their buildings and those who did not. The circle of light may have shown up gaps, but this, too, was useful: it reminded the viewer-participants that GPS was not only a game with facades, it was also a gauge of depth, and where the light could not reach was also where conversation needed to reach.

In 2007 Sukumaran created *Two Poles*, a work that takes the form of a long line of light stretching for about half a kilometre, bridging two quite different worlds: those of privilege on the one hand, the Bandra promenade; and of working-class dinginess on the other, at the edge of Chuiim village. The line can be activated by switches embedded in the streetscape at either end.

The travelling light signals a presence on the other side of the social horizon. For the people who come for a walk on the promenade, their horizon is the paving from where they turn back. And the boys from the slums will not go to the promenade because the guards will shoo them away. So when they get a chance to confront the invisible, antiseptic promenade-wallahs, they reply to their light signal by jamming the system, keeping the switch pressed so that the light cannot be 'sent back'. The act of 'jamming' a light system can be

seen as a little coup won by the little Pirates of Chuim against the Uncles of Prom. Historically speaking, this coup resonates with the breaking of street lights as a subversion of law and order during a street fight or an uprising.

To conclude, *One Agreement* (2007) generates a relationship between two consumers of electricity at opposite ends of the spectrum of opportunity and legitimacy: a sandwich vendor on the Bandra promenade and a woman living in a residential tower. The work tries to redress the 'power' imbalance between two people, who would never otherwise have been 'connected' to each other.

One Agreement directly confronts the issue of electricity not just as a naturalised source of light, but as a source of energy and an element of infrastructure that bears a monetary and transactional value. While the millions of people who live in these shantytowns provide the megalopolis with labour, staffing its vast informal sector, they are not given access to the basic entitlements that all citizens must enjoy. Sukumaran's intervention dramatises this asymmetry of entitlement, using electricity both as a vivid image and a key component of its politics.

NANCY ADAJANIA is a cultural theorist, art critic and independent curator based in India.



Ashok Sukumaran
Glow Positioning System (site diagram), 2005

LIST OF WORKS

ALFREDO AND ISABEL AQUILIZAN
Address, 2008
From the project *Another Country*,
2007–2008
Personal effects, Sampaguita scent
300 x 400 x 300 cm
Courtesy the artists and Jan Manton
Art, Brisbane

RICHARD GOODWIN
Parasite, 2005
Timber, plastic
42 x 87 x 94 cm

Jenga Porosity, 2005
Painted foam
100 x 55 x 30 cm

Jenga Porosity, 2005
Single channel video
10 minutes

What a building desires, 2005
Single channel video
10 minutes

What a building desires, 2005
Inkjet print on archival paper

Cactus model, 2005
Inkjet print on archival paper

Tree model, 2005
Inkjet print on archival paper

All works courtesy Australian
Galleries, Sydney

OU NING
The Da Zha Lan Project
Video, photographs, sound
installation and publication,
2005–2006:

Meishi Street
DVD format
85 minutes
Director: Ou Ning
Original video by Zhang Jinli
Additional Camera work: Huang
Weikai, Ou Ning, Cao Fei
Editors: Cao Fei, Ou Ning
English Subtitles: David Bandurski
Production: Alternative Archive

Meishi Street Panorama
Colour photographs with lightbox
24 x 985 x 12 cm
Concept: Ou Ning
Photographer: Zhao Long

Passing Through Da Zha Lan
Sound Installation
7 minutes, 32 seconds
Concept: Ou Ning
Sound artist: Olivier Meys

The Story of Zhang Jinli
Booklet
Author and Editor: Ou Ning

The Da Zha Lan Project
Website (www.dazhalan-project.org)

SQUATSPACE
Tour of Beauty (Redfern/Waterloo)
Sunday 22 June, 2008

Tour of Beauty archive (2005–2008)
Seven videos
Varying duration

ASHOK SUKUMARAN
Video documentations of works
executed in public spaces:

Glow Positioning System, 2005
Single channel video
5 minutes
Commissioned for the Mumbai
Festival 2005 with support from the
Jindal South-West Foundation.
Produced by Chitrakarkhana Mumbai/
Shaina Anand

One Agreement, 2007
Single channel video
4 minutes
Self-initiated project as part of the
Recurrencies series, supported by
the Daniel Langlois Foundation for
Art, Science and Technology, and the
India Foundation for the Arts

Two Poles, 2007
Single channel video
6 minutes
Self-initiated project as part of the
Recurrencies series, supported by
the Daniel Langlois Foundation for
Art, Science and Technology, and the
India Foundation for the Arts

All works courtesy Thomas Erben
Gallery, New York

Published by Ivan Dougherty Gallery,
College of Fine Arts,
The University of New South Wales,
2008 on the occasion
of the exhibition *Concrete Culture*,
29 May – 5 July, 2008.

EDITOR: Felicity Fenner

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS:

Nancy Adajania, Zanny Begg,
Thomas J. Berghuis, Hou Hanru,
Gerard Reinmuth

Exhibition and catalogue developed
by Ivan Dougherty Gallery
and Centre for Contemporary Art
and Politics, UNSW, in association
with Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre
in connection with a Linkage Project
funded by the Australian Research
Council (ARC).

CATALOGUE CONCEPT AND DESIGN:
Boccalatte

ISBN 978 0 7334 2645 2

© 2008 All material is owned by
the artists. Copyright in the text is
held by the authors. Copyright in the
images is held by the artists.

This book is copyright. Apart from
any fair dealing for the purpose of
private study, research, criticism
or review, as permitted under the
Copyright Act, no part may be
reproduced by any process without
written permission. Inquiries should
be addressed to the publisher.

