

Faculty of Design

2015

Kapsula

Pearl, Zach, LeBlanc, Lindsay, Terziyska, Yoli, England, Sara, Granados, Francisco-Fernando, Morgan-Feir, Caoimhe and Dennis, Katherine

Suggested citation:

Pearl, Zach, LeBlanc, Lindsay, Terziyska, Yoli, England, Sara, Granados, Francisco-Fernando, Morgan-Feir, Caoimhe and Dennis, Katherine (2015) Kapsula. Summer School, 3 . KAPSULA PRESS, Toronto, Canada. Available at <https://openresearch.ocadu.ca/id/eprint/958/>

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JULY 2015

FIELDWORK

SUMMER SCHOOL





VOLUME THREE

JULY 2015 : SUMMER SCHOOL

PRODUCTION

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LICENCING



ISSN 2292-7204

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KAPSULA Magazine is an imprint of:

KAPSULA PRESS
44 Hedges Boulevard
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Marginal Geographies 001

PRE-REQUISITES: A BAD MEMORY

We're all familiar with the foundations of geography as an area of study: land, borders, property, what's mine is mine and if you want it to be yours, we recommend enrolling in a World History course. You might find you're not the first to see the grass on the other side and decide that it should look a little greener. Unfortunately, learning about the marginalia requires the erasure of other types of knowledge that pushed for the margin in the first place.

CLASS DESCRIPTION:

Marginal Geographies moves beyond the foundations of its core subject or, perhaps more accurately, between. We continue to find time to study boundaries, but never the bits and pieces that fall between borderlines. In an aim to revisit history in a critical, productive way, we find new routes through our cultural memory, different ways of navigating meaningful places.

For some, the notion of owning space reads as an unfamiliar story, a fairy-tale on par with The Princess and the Pea. When all that lies beneath your mattress is worn-down concrete and old cigarette butts,

PROLOGUE

the privilege to know how home should feel holds new significance. In this month's class, our interest lies in investigating the nooks and crannies to find what may not be apparent yet fundamental.

TESTIMONIAL:

In Grade 9, my Social Studies teacher grew so upset at a student that he went off book, yelled out loud, and threw his hand down onto the desk in anger. He came to class the next day with a broken hand, wrapped up in gauze and a cast—glaring evidence of the incident. Maybe it doesn't matter that the boy eventually dropped out of high school and fell off the map, but it does make me wonder: if Mr. Smith can go over the edge, why can't the rest of us?

LESSON PLAN

1. Reading between the Lines: identifying marginal geographies
2. Cracks and crevices: the development of urban margins
3. Dichotomies in nature; taking down the patriarchy
4. Field trip (with material culture activity)
5. Principles of Xenophobia: Exposing system oppression through social sculpture

GRADING SCHEME

Critical thinking skills	50%
Reading and comprehension	25%
Curiosity	20%
Scrolling	5%

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The places where people choose to squat, inhabiting space in a manner that subverts the concept of property, often qualify as urban cracks. These are areas in the city which, because they are temporarily free from use, allow for urban change to take place—the “socio-economic developments [that] cause our cities to continually transform, both socially and physically” (Verschelden et al. 2012, 282). If one were to conceptualize the metropolis as a puzzle with sliding blocks, an urban crack is the empty space into which adjacent pieces can move (Hamers 2006). Whether these shifts occur horizontally or vertically, towards the city center or away from it, urban cracks signal the potential for and the inevitability of change. A factory is shut down and utilized as studio spaces; a derelict apartment is demolished, and a community garden grows in its place until developers arrive to construct a glass condo; a new road is paved, and a former commuter bridge is transformed into a park. As liminal areas that sit on the threshold between past and future, urban cracks present prime opportunities for people to

move in and utilize dormant space without awaiting permission from the city. These are often areas where “different logics and needs conflict” (Verschelden et al. 2012, 277), imperatives collide, and two or more actors vie for agency over an area.

Just as urban cracks reside on the threshold between the past and future usage of a space, Tom Burrows’ practice situates itself between multiple disciplines, from his sculptural works to his research as artist-cum-social scientist, as evidenced by his recent solo exhibition at the Morris and Helen Belkin Art Gallery in Vancouver.

During the late 60s and early 70s, Burrows lived in a “no man’s land” of disputed claim—the squatter community of the Maplewood Mudflats in North Vancouver. This intertidal area was home to Burrows and his family until it was razed in 1971 by civic authorities, an event that sparked the artist’s several-years-long research project on the subject of

squatting. The endeavor led Burrows across multiple continents to investigate and document instances of “occupying” land everywhere from Cairo to London, Bombay to Berlin. The photographs and texts compiled from this research constitute a large portion of the exhibition display—lining the walls, placed in vitrines, and reproduced in Duo-Tang for viewers to peruse. Taken together, these documents attest to the universality of resistance, subversion, and the seeking-out of alternatives to state-enforced concepts of property. A selection of Burrows’ sculptural works draw a par-

allel between the ephemerality of the structures and the makeup of the city itself. For instance, both the blocks that comprise *Cement Pyramid in 32 Pieces* and the buildings of the urban metropolis appear sturdy and impermeable, yet in actuality are subject to malleability and destruction. The blocks of varying sizes are spread out in the center of one of the gallery’s wings; most lie in disarray, though six are stacked so as to resemble a partial pyramid. Despite the disorganized state of the pieces, the potential for reassembly and reconstruction is always present. Like *Cement Pyramid in*

32 Pieces, the buildings that collectively constitute the physical geography of the city will invariably change, and certain sections—like the squatter cabins of the Maplewood Mudflats which used to line the North Shore—are bound to one day be leveled to make way for new developments.

The pliability of built landscapes becomes more evident with *Sand Pile*, the placard above which implores, “PLEASE DO PLAY WITH THE SAND”. On a circular tabletop, the pile of near-white, fine grains are open to manipulation. The rotating hands of gallery visitors constantly shift it into new formations, the trails from their fingers still present. Playing on loop on a mounted monitor, two hands carefully create a pyramid out of the sand (recalling the form of *Cement Pyramid in 32 Pieces*) before re-shaping the structure once again into an unassuming pile.

Perhaps Burrows’ move to works made of polyresin marks an attempt to step away from the ephemeral and to grasp ahold of something more permanent. These are the most prominent in the exhibition by virtue of being vast in quantity. In some instances, two or three are installed side-by-side, or one on top of the other, their edges aligned and touching, in a wide array of colours, some with a glossy sheen that refracts the light, others that absorb it to take on a luminosity. Their weight and scale exert an authority over the space.

However, regardless of formal dominance, the documents are the exhibition’s strong point. Though the actual steel, rope, and brick that comprise the sculpture *Mud Ring* are installed in the gallery, the photo-

graphs of the work are preferable over the presence of these materials. The images provide a context for the work, placing it in its original site. Shots taken through the window of Burrows' former home show the atmosphere of its original location: the sculpture reflects on the water's surface with mountains and city skyline in the background. The physicality of the materials, removed from their original site and placed within the white cube, cannot compare to their counterpart documentary photographs.

In the squatting research documents, Burrows brings to light a linguistic nuance intended to manipulate public perspective on state action. Whereas historically, when state officials have wiped out communities, often by fire, they claim to be "clearing" the land; yet, if someone acting from outside the state apparatus takes such an action, it is deemed a criminal act of arson. Burrows protests this discrepancy through his insistence that the destruction of his home was also, in fact, arson. The arbitrary distinction between "clearing" and "arson" reveals a linguistic trick used by the legal apparatus of the state "to deflect questions of its own innate violence to the violence that makes law necessary" (Blomley 2003, 124). A similarity is found in the actions of the civilian when compared to those of the state in the event of a clash. Popular media may describe the former as irrational, dangerous, and "violent", while the latter simply uses "force" — force which is supposedly necessary, rational, and justified. A third example of such linguistic nuances lies in the belief that owners "reside" on land, while renters and squatters "occupy" it (Blomley 2005, 126), the "occupation" of a space implying that one is of a lower class of citizenry. And when one does not own their land, there are other, marginal spaces for them to occupy, such as prisons, shelters, and reserves.

The irony of the state's disapproval of squatting is that its governing bodies seek to eliminate squatters while simultaneously attempting to own and preserve these very histories. Though Vancouver does not condemn its forceful clearing (i.e., violent arson) carried out against the Mudflats squatter community, it nonetheless chooses to encapsulate this incident as a contribution to its "vibrant" cultural history — thus celebrating its former squatter communities only after destroying them and

displacing their occupants.

Though space today is as heavily guarded, and private property as highly revered as ever, the city curiously opts to fund exhibitions like Burrows', and to commission works like Ken Lum's *From Shangri-la to Shangri-la* (2010), which facilitated the recreation of three of the former homes of the Maplewood Mudflats squatter community (including that of Burrows), situated at the foot of the Shangri-La hotel in downtown Vancouver during the 2010 Olympic Games. The case of "Al and Carole's Cabin" reinforces the irony surrounding squatting. The cabin, which has served as both home and artist studio for many years, was recently scheduled to be demolished—an order that was spurred after nearby land was bought up by Polygon Homes, owned by Michael Audain, well-known local patron of the arts. As Esther Rausenberg, executive director of the Eastside Culture Crawl, summed it up in conversation with The Georgia Straight, "It's ironic that we're spending money on having artists reproduce mudflat cabins but we're struggling to save the real thing" (Varty 2005).

What a squat does, in regards to the usage of the word as both a noun and a verb—and what Burrows' exhibition does as well, for that matter—is pose questions about popular assumptions surrounding conceptions of property. Transgression of property has taken on a stigma that places it on par with acts of violence, and the subsequent retaliatory acts of "force" taken against the transgressors are overshadowed by the blind conviction that property must be held sacred. Yet, property is little more than a collection of actions centered on an understanding that certain

people have the right to oversee others' inclusion, exclusion, and actions within a delineated area. As Nicholas Blomley writes:

[Property] is not a static, pre-given entity, but depends on a continual, active 'doing'. ...Bodies, technologies, and things must be enrolled and mobilized into organized and disciplined practices. [Property] must be enacted upon material spaces and real people, including owners and those who are to be excluded. Police officers must enforce the law. Legal contracts must be inscribed, signed, and witnessed. Citizens must physically respect the spatial markers of property (Blomley 2003, 122).

When a group of people transgress any of the actions that constitute the performance that is property, the concept itself is called into question and potentially jeopardized through the revealing of its delicate nature. Even those who inhabited the "no man's land" of the intertidal area of the Maplewood Mudflats posed a threat to the system by displaying an alternative that lay outside of it. Art practices such as those of Burrows propose property as not a given, but a performance, highlighting its historical underpinnings, its contradictions, and the myriad interactions that make it possible.

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JORGE MACCHI'S BUENOS AIRES TOUR AND ALTERNATIVE PATHS THROUGHOUT ART HISTORY

Benedetta Casini

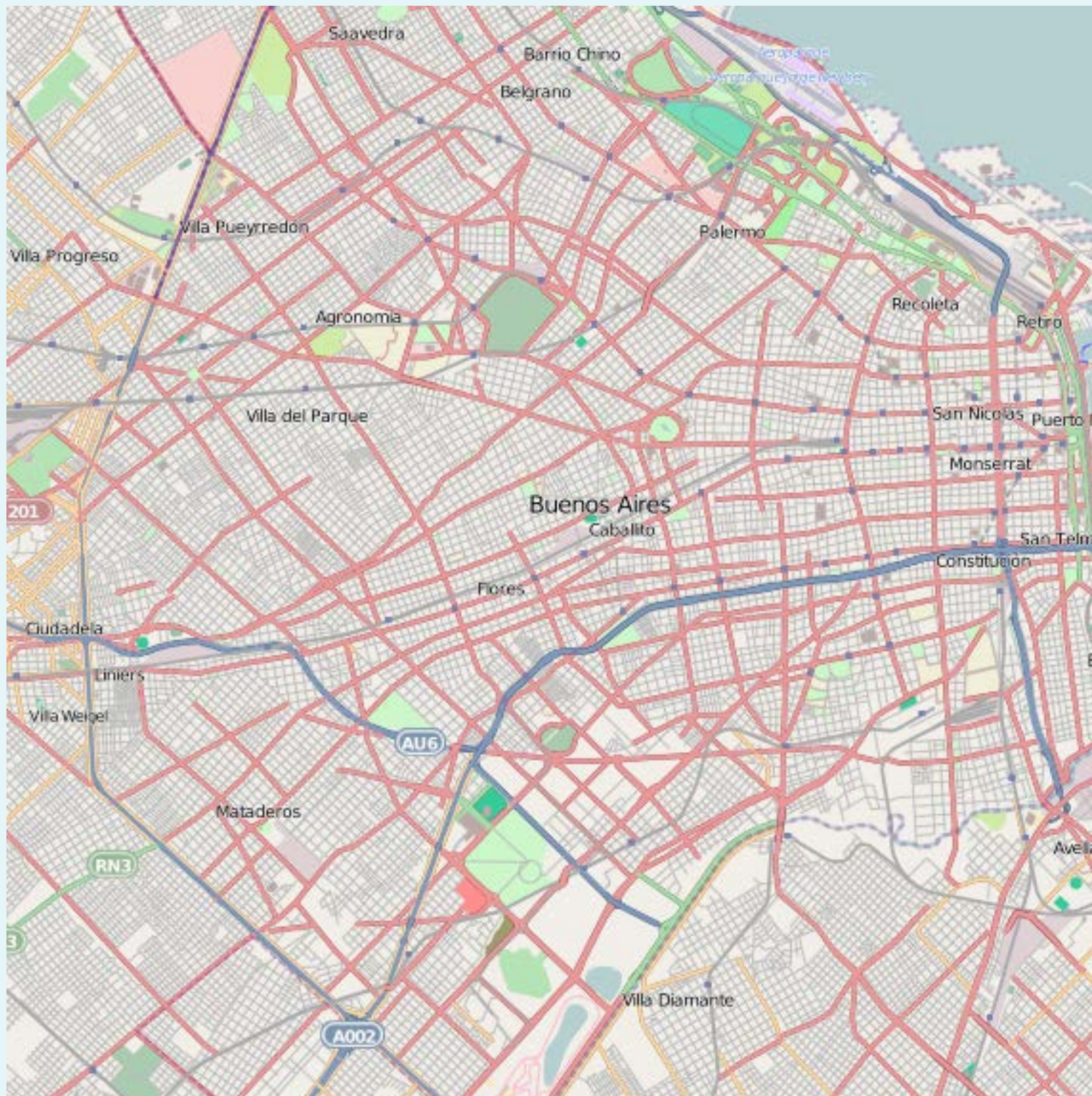
In 2005 Jorge Macchi broke up a pane of glass that he had previously superimposed on a map of Buenos Aires. This was the starting point for his deconstruction and consequent rediscovery of his native city. Following the fracture lines across the glass, Macchi traced on the map eight permanent itineraries articulated in forty-six points of interest, generated according to street corners. Afterwards he walked through these unusual paths, frequently encountering unknown places that he documented by taking photographs (of graffiti, traffic signals, or animals populating the streets) and collecting found objects (a diary, playing cards, or religious pamphlets). The journey was undertaken together with Berlin-based musician Edgardo Rudnitsky, who collected sounds as constitutive features of a stated place, and New York-based writer Maria Negroni, who recorded her sensory experience in the form of visual texts. The three responses were arranged in an installation titled *Buenos Aires Tour*, made of the original map, the glass, the objects, the pho-

tographs, and the sounds, as well as a book filled with comprehensive documentation of the project.

In this essay, I investigate how the act of walking has been interpreted by writers since the nineteenth century and later been employed by artists, relating contemporary “artistic walks” such as Macchi’s to a historically-rooted desire for marginality and authenticity – particularly evident in the tourism industry’s most recent trends, which arose as a reaction to the growing standardisation of urban landscapes. Following these considerations I frame Macchi’s *Buenos Aires Tour* with the concept “minor practice,” sourced from Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “minor literature,” on the basis of its emphasis on the local and the vernacular. The project’s interest in locality gets articulated by methods belonging to twentieth century art tradition, and through its proposal of an alternative to the status quo. Indeed, the relevance of *Buenos Aires Tour* lies precisely in its attempt to offer an unusual way of representing and experiencing space, not simply by offering a general critique

of a current situation, but rather by effectively presenting a potential alternative that focuses on local and unusual paths rather than on globally recognized and conventional ones.

Starting from the nineteenth century, the act of walking has received special attention in literature as a way to evade isolation, a liberating and inspiring way to experience the city, or a means of opposing the hegemonic and intrusive effects of urban planning. For example, in 1840 Edgar Allan Poe published *The Man of the Crowd*, in which the urban dweller's purposeless walk is described as an escape from isolation. More famously, in his essay *Le Peintre de la Vie Moderne*, published in 1863, Charles Baudelaire defines the figure of the "flâneur" – someone for whom "it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid



the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home" (Baudelaire 1864, 9). For Baudelaire's flâneur, the city and the crowd were a natural, everyday environment and an essential source of inspiration. This concept was later recalled by Walter Benjamin who, in his *The Arcades Project* (1927-1940), highlighted how the flâneur's attitude represented the perfect instance for *Erfahrung*, the ability to actively experience the city as an inexhaustible source of enlivening sounds, smells, and sights. As opposite to *Erfahrung*, *Erlebnis* designated a sort of anaesthesia produced by the often overwhelming atmosphere of the modern city, whose rhythms had been impetuously accelerated due to the capitalistic logic of production that followed the industrial revolution (Seal 2013). In 1980 Michel de Certeau further expanded the concept, lingering on governmental and institutional construction of the city. According to Certeau, city planning does not respond to the real necessities of the individual citizen but develops according to economical and corporative interests. In Certeau's city, built on structural violence, the "walker" needs to fight the conditionings of urban formation by generating personal and unconventional itineraries, which must differ from the utilitarian ones dispensed by institutions (Di Cori 2002, 141). From all these texts emerges a portrayal

of the city as a space that holds the potential of escape from the evils of modern life as much as it harbours the highest threat of them, depending on the way the subject intends to experience it.

Following these considerations, artists throughout the twentieth century actively challenged the “official” ways of living in the city. Using different strategies, they aimed to achieve a new, fertile awareness of the spaces they inhabited day-to-day. The Dadaist’s visit to the churchyard of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre in 1921 was meant to “remedy the incompetence of guides and dubious Cicerones” by selecting the forgotten church as a tour destination, which inevitably highlighted the limited coverage of the place by conventional guided tours. The Surrealists’ “deambulation” relocated this spatial investigation to the countryside; entirely relying on chance, Louis Aragon, Andre Breton, Max Morise and Roger Vitrac, randomly selected the small town of Blois, whose territory was employed as the testing ground for an irrational wandering driven by unconscious impulses that should have led to a sort of hypnosis. Artists’ errant walking acquired further critical and theoretical relevance with the Situationists’ “*dérive*,” described in 1956 by Guy Debord as a “technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances” (Debord 1958). This peripatetic act needed to be void of purpose and destination, and the direction would have been suggested by “psychogeographical contours [of the city], with constant currents, fixed points and vortexes that strongly discourage entry into or exit from certain zones” (Debord 1958). Thus, the official city paths—those constructed in order to permit the citizen to most efficiently reach a stated destination—were being eluded and subsequently deconstructed by such walks. The outcome for the Situationists was a psychogeographical map of newly explored areas that hardly reminded the actual physical arrangement of the city. The journeys from which the map derived were represented with arrows demonstrating the psy-

chogeographical effect of the city on the walker’s choice of direction; “*dérive*” was therefore an alternative way to study urban planning, based on the examination of the psychological responses it encouraged.

A renewed interest in the act of walking arose in artistic practices over the last two decades, which is shown, for example, in the work of Italian collective ***Stalker/Osservatorio Nomade***. Since 2002, the group of architects, artists, activists and researchers have been using collective walks as analytical tools oriented to experimental urban research. Their collective “transurbances” take place in peripheral areas of various cities, including Milan, Turin, Rome, and Berlin. The selected zones are generally degraded, and as such have been disregarded; *Stalker/Osservatorio Nomade* bring to light their roots and concealed stories. The investigations cultivate “a sense that springs from the experience of the present state of things with all its contradictions, from an unopinionated perspective, free of reassuring and at the same time frustrating historical or functional justifications” (Careri 2002, 34). Alongside architectonic concerns, *Stalker/Osservatorio Nomade* maintains an interest in developing a closer relationship between the inhabitants of a place and its urban fabric; in order to encourage a deep awareness of a city’s complexity, the collective prioritizes the involvement of local communities in the project.

All of the aforementioned peripatetic explorations of the city reveal a desire for reaching out to the margins, the periphery, and the unknown—an unofficial and alternative construction of space. This desire formerly originated from the necessity to escape the pressures of the industrialized city, re-establishing a contact with one’s interiority and subconscious, as testified for instance by the Surrealists’ “deambulation” and later by the Situationist’s “*derive*.” Subjectivity was overpowered by the logic of production and the accelerated rhythms of everyday life, as well as rationalistic urban development, epitomized by the Modernist architecture promoted by Le Corbusier; the infamous architect was described by Ivan Chhtcheglov as an individual dominated by

“some sort of psychological repression” who wanted “to squash people under ignoble masses of reinforced concrete” (Chtcheglov 1953). Today, an inclination toward the marginal, the peripheral, and the unknown can be interpreted as a desire for authenticity and specificity in a globalized world, implicit in Stalker’s “transurbance” and Macchi’s *Buenos Aires Tour*.

The penchant for rediscovering and revaluing forgotten places has also been evidenced by tourists seeking alternative modes of travel, challenging hegemonic itineraries fabricated ad’ hoc for touristic purposes. This particular kind of tourism expanded over the last decade and has been labelled as *authentic tourism* or *slow tourism*, related to the so-called Hermann Hesse syndrome. The reference to Hesse becomes clear in relation to the poet’s journey in Italy in 1901, when he suddenly threw away the Florence guide in order to

autonomously experience the city and directly come into contact with its inhabitants, mixing up with the locals in an almost mimetic investigation of otherness. Hermann Hesse syndrome was theorized in opposition to “zoo-syndrome,” describing the sensation of estrangement and detachment felt when visiting touristic sites that seem disconnected from the local reality. Where Hesse’s reaction against the infrastructures of tourism was at the time a single and exceptional case, nowadays this type of reaction is becoming increasingly widespread, speaking to the increasingly common desire for genuine interactions with local life (Montanari 2008, 134).

Macchi’s *Buenos Aires Tour* holds a similar aspiration, which could be more precisely understood as “minor practice,” a concept that comes from what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari call “minor literature.” In their 1986 book *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, the authors re-interpret Franz Kafka’s



work according to their newly theorized concept of “minor literature,” based on three essential elements: de-territorialization of a major language, political engagement, and collective production. This notion, originally related to literature, has been variously associated with other practices, including contemporary art. In his *Notes Towards a Minor Art Practice*, Simon O’Sullivan highlights how a minor practice is involved with “de-territorializing—stammering—the global language of contemporary art production, for example in a focus on the local (a turn to the vernacular)” (O’Sullivan 2005). He goes on to specify that “a minor art will connect different regimes together, and in particular will connect art to the wider social milieu. If a minor practice is always political it is because it is always opening itself up to an outside in this sense” (O’Sullivan 2005). Minor art’s openness to the outside world challenges the historically-prized autonomy of art, namely the lack of engagement or even complete indifference to the wider social, political, and economical system in which art is produced. O’Sullivan stresses the importance of invention and creation as necessary components of the resistance that “minor practices” stages against dominant urban systems. He identifies “two moments, or movements, to a minor practice: one of dissent (either a strategic withdrawal as a form of engagement, or strategic engagement itself), and one of creativity (the production of new forms)” (O’Sullivan 2005). Macchi’s *Buenos Aires Tour* comprises these three requisites, reacting against the hegemonic and conventional construction of the city while simultaneously offering an alternative to it.

Macchi’s art practice implicitly criticises the status quo (such as in the case of *Buenos Aires Tour*) by investigating forgotten fragments of the city through recognizable and international languages of contemporary art, whose strategies are adjusted and reassembled to reflect Macchi’s concerns. As with the artistic walks cited above, Macchi’s lacks a final destination; its purpose is the walk itself, as a means to unconventionally an-

alyze urban space. He chose his areas of investigation by chance, specifically by way of the glass’ cracks. By employing chance, Macchi gives himself a task in order to restrict his freedom of choice, preventing his subconscious from interfering with the exploration by driving him to places that feel comfortable and familiar. This procedure has been extensively used by artists since the twentieth century, for instance in La Monte Young’s *Composition 1960* that included an instruction to “draw a straight line and follow it” or, more recently, in Simon Faithfull’s *0°00 Navigation* (2011), where the artist set out to walk through United Kingdom following the imaginary line of the Greenwich Meridian, overcoming all the obstacles that he encountered. Here, as well as in *Buenos Aires Tour*, the artist looks for the unexpected through an indiscriminately pre-selected itinerary, which at the same time has the effect of a reassuring frame within which these encounters are expected to happen. From this point of view Macchi’s walk differs from the Situationist “*dérive*,” being that the latter was based precisely on unconscious responses to the city’s geography—even though Debord also acknowledged limitations to intentionally purposeless urban wandering, such as the “possible rendezvous,” a fictitious appointment that forces the subject to hike over specific unknown itineraries (Debord 1958).

However, the affinity between the Situationist’s practice and *Buenos Aires Tour* resonates in the intimate remapping of a city after the journey, based not so much on its geography but rather on the personal stories that inhabit it. The belief behind this reconstruction of the city is that conventional cartographic representation naturally involves an oversimplification of the urban landscape and fails in representing its complexity. In *Buenos Aires Tour*, the complexity of urban spaces is shown through photographs that offer insight into the actual, physical appearance of the city and a collection of found objects that serve as emblems of the lives of people who inhabit it. Thus, rather than touristic monuments and usual meeting sites, residue from others’ experiences function as the datum points for an alternative and personal depiction of Buenos Aires, which then becomes a sort-

of “triple self-portrait: more than the description of a city, the record of our histories, our impressions and our decisions.” Macchi produces a map inextricably connected with his personal experience of an area in a specific moment in time, even though the guide is intended to give “the visitors who are just staying a few days in Buenos Aires, and even people who live there, the possibility to deepen their knowledge of the city” (Macchi 2004, 1). *Buenos Aires Tour* not only offers an account of the artist’s experience—it is meant to be a shared guide that also offers a decentred perspective on the urban landscape, or an alternative method of experiencing it. In this way, Macchi’s *Buenos Aires Tour* meets the third requirement required for a “minor art practice” as defined by Simon O’ Sullivan: the creative moment consisting in the proposal of new forms.

Through *Buenos Aires Tour* Macchi achieves a double objective; on the one hand, he makes us aware of how our understanding of a city is not only simplified but also partial, and on the other hand he offers a realistic and seductive alternative to it. By putting us in contact with the marginal, the peripheral, and the unexpected, he construes in advance an often-wordless desire for authentic experiences of place, advancing historical reactions to the cultural and urban standardization to which we are becoming unconsciously accustomed.

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**KEITH
COLE**

TWINNINGS

(FUCK AUTHORITY)

TWINS

TWINS

TWINS

FUCK
AUTHORITY

Wendy Coburn,
R.I.P.



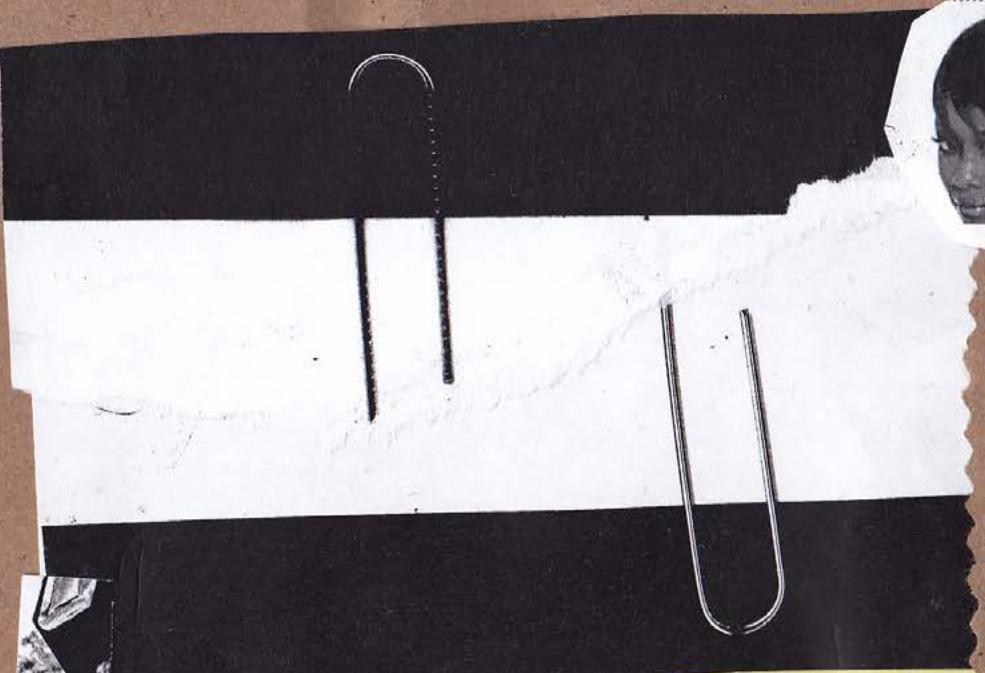


Kate Cole 2015

Zach Pearl
Kapsula
"Twins" thing ASAP

FUCK AUTHORITY

Kate Cole 2015



Keith Cole

Re. artwork

July 2, 2015 at 7:59 PM

Zach Pearl

Hi ---

what does 'compositionally' mean exactly - and remember . . . we know each other
also remember there were "no rules" as it was the "summer issue" and "school is out"
be brave Zach

I encourage you to be brave

I *dare* you to be brave

Leap forward

Be the first

Take a chance

Groundbreak

Be a maverick

Trail blaze

I - maybe then no one will get hurt

but... if that cannot be then of course, please allow them to live in the 'interior' away from initial viewing

I am camping with 4 butch lesbians - 2 of them SHB (short hair butches) the other 2 LHB (long hair butches) - the much desired LHB - so rare and so wanted.

I am being brave and forging ahead with the butches - I encourage all radical acts - do it for Wendy ~~Q~~
leader who loved and encouraged all things LGBT and beyond.

A leader.

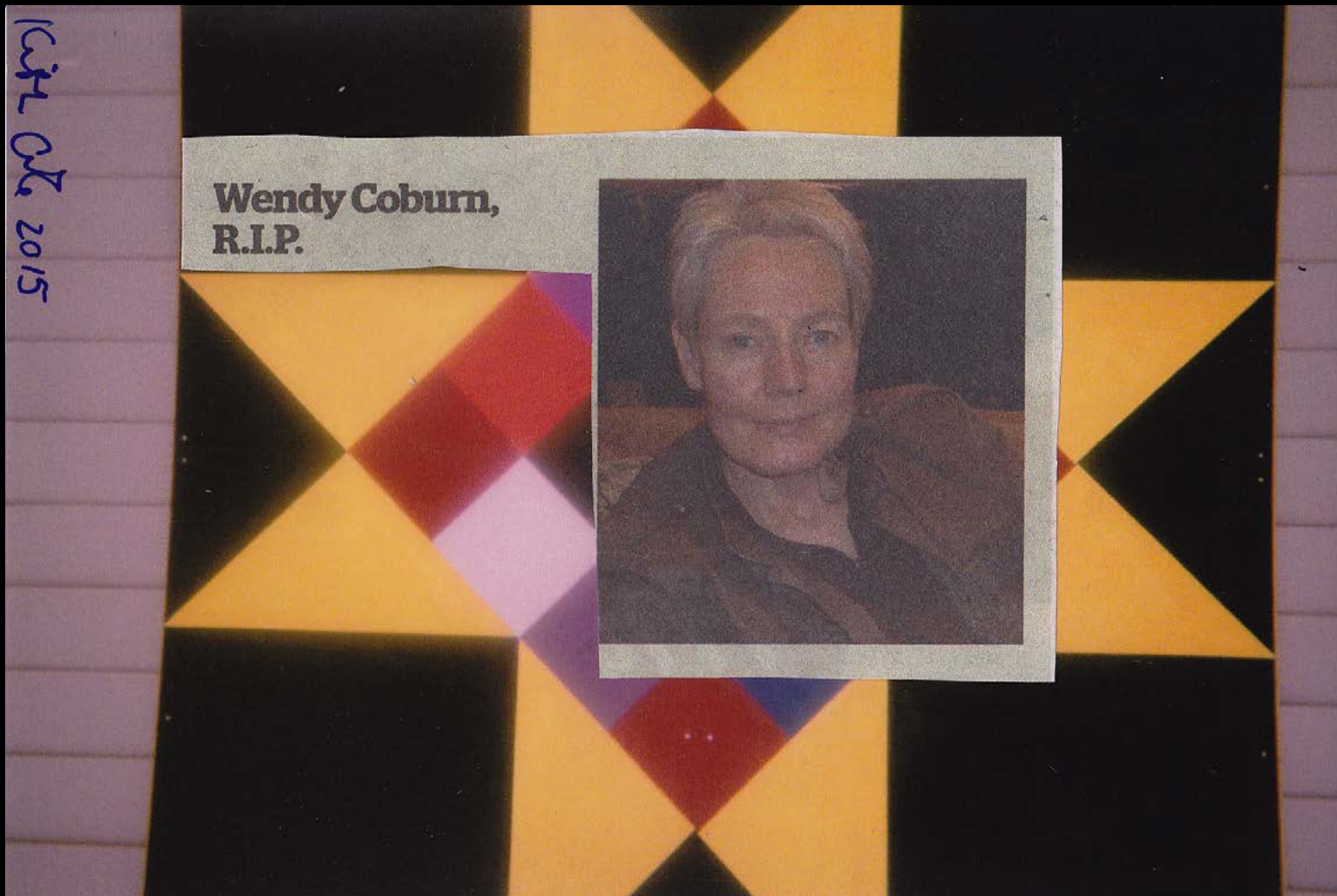
A trailblazer.

all of us with courage lost a big one with her death and it is going to hurt for a long time.

She was a SHB and a radical

Keith


xo



One thing I really want to accomplish in this life is good old fashioned hellraising – something I still love to do. Just ask around....

Keith Cole

xo



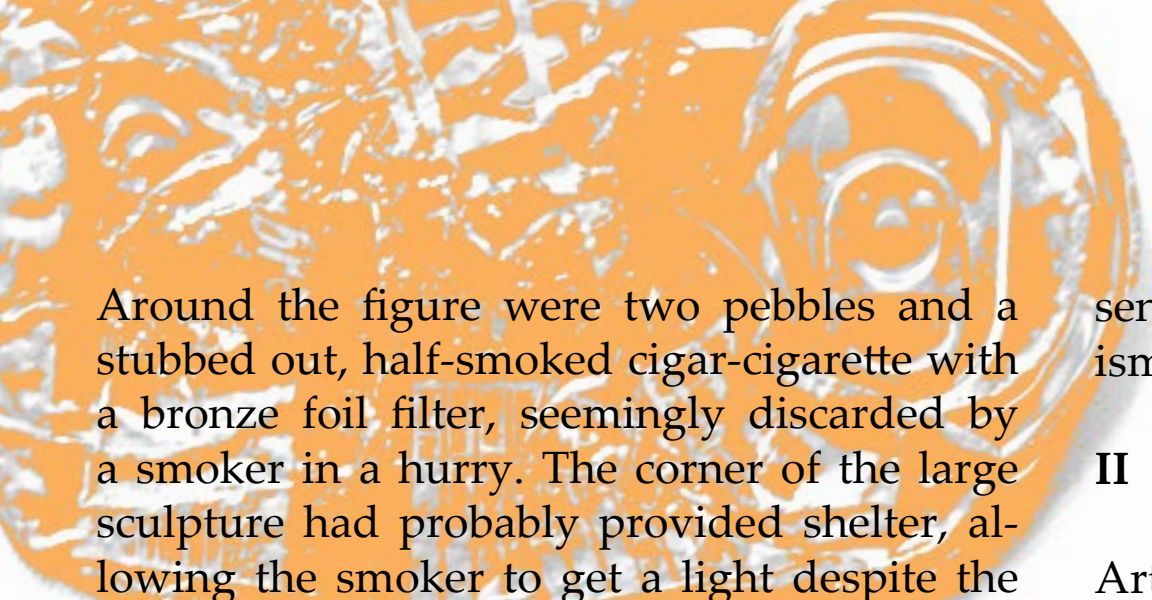
the Remnants of Occupants

KURT KRALER

I

At the Galt War Memorial in Cambridge, Ontario stands a cenotaph designed by Francis Loring (a top sculptor in her day) memorializing the fallen soldiers during the first and second World Wars. Two figures emerge from the stone, one facing south with his head held high to represent Victory, while the figure on the reverse represents Peace, eyes cast downward in mourning of those whose lives had been sacrificed in her name. The names of all 376 slain soldiers are etched on the sides of the stone plinth supporting the two figures, a role call for those who would never return to their home in Galt.

During a recent visit to the memorial, I made a peculiar discovery. Tucked into one of the corners at the base of the cenotaph lay a small figure resembling a Ken doll, the head of which had been replaced by the head of a lighter. The figure was missing all of its extremities yet sporting a semi-erect penis. A smudge of a black pube bush had been air brushed just above the penis, with two tiny pink nipples hastily painted onto the light-skinned rubber lighter case. The war-time draft had pulled all kinds of men together, allowing some to lay claim to their dormant desires and foster a burgeoning sexuality (Lowder 2015).



Around the figure were two pebbles and a stubbed out, half-smoked cigar-cigarette with a bronze foil filter, seemingly discarded by a smoker in a hurry. The corner of the large sculpture had probably provided shelter, allowing the smoker to get a light despite the persistent gustiness of the oft chilling early spring wind. Still the discarded body of the lighter cover held my attention, and its surprising crudeness translated as an unsettling reminder of the atrocities that war can inflict upon bodies—commemorated by the glorious figures of Peace and Victory. Further, the discarding of bodies used to light cigarettes soberly manifested the bodies cast aside in the fields of war.

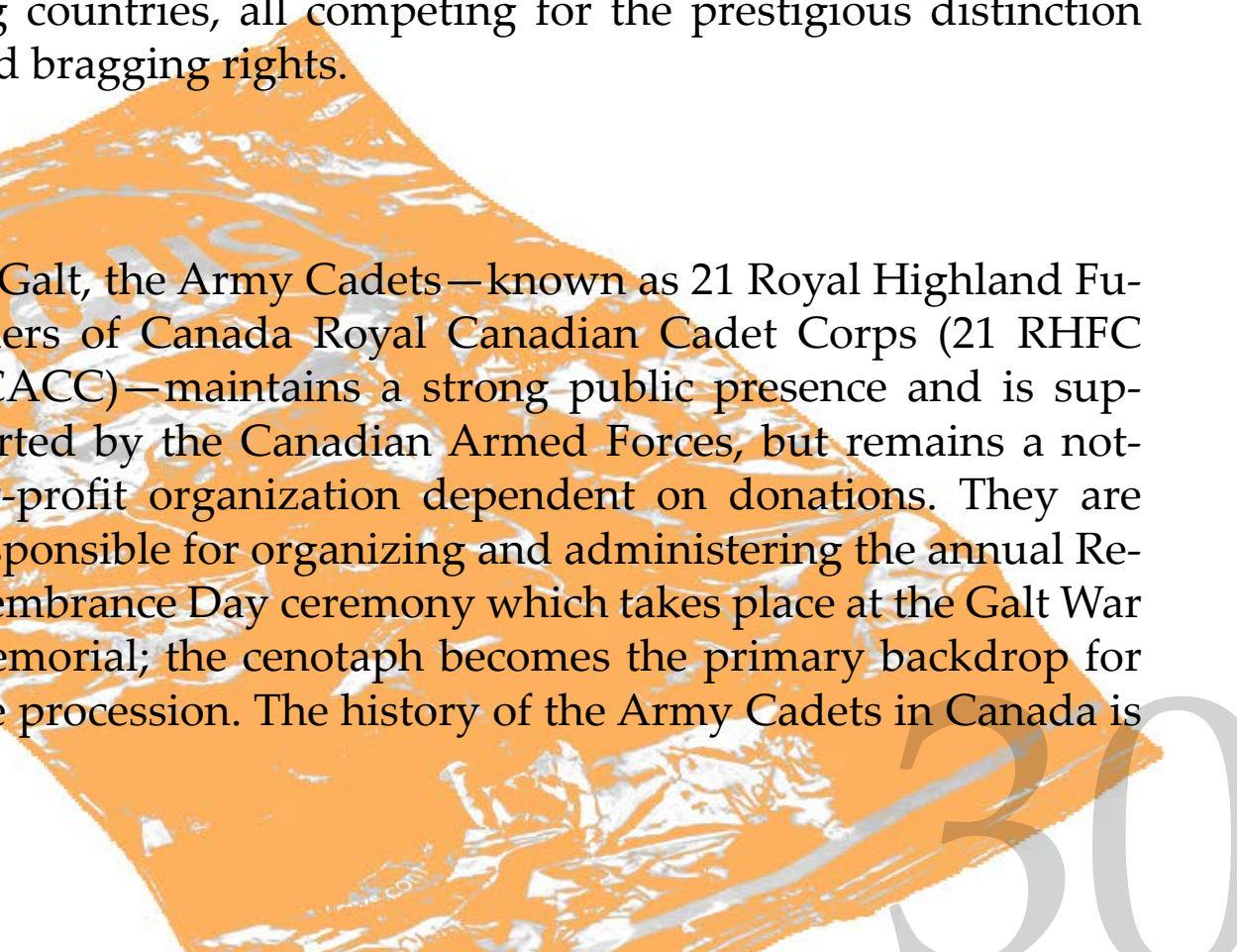
From the unexpected discovery, questions of its origin arose: where had this lighter case come from? A quick Google search for **“novelty lighter cover cases”** turned up four images of similar lighter cases, suggesting that it was far more common than initially thought. They were all available for sale online through a website called AliExpress.com, priced at \$9.99 USD, and came included with a large-chested female equivalent with red pubic hair. The website of the online Chinese retailer prominently stated: “We aim to build the future infrastructure of commerce. We envision that our customers will meet, work and live at Alibaba, and that we will be a company that lasts at least 102 years.” The ambitious claims of the company, to be achieved through the sale of cheap novelty items, recast the bodies repre-

sented by these lighter cases as products of online imperialism, to be exchanged across borders and territories.

II

Artist Sarah Lucas’ exhibition entitled *I Scream Daddio* for the 56th Venice Art Biennale pairs genitals with cigarettes in crude fashion for comedic effect. Representing Britain at the Biennale, a portion of the exhibition comprised of plaster casts of the bottom half of Lucas’ friends’ bodies, cut just above the bellybutton, positioned over a variety of objects like chairs, desks, and a toilet, all with a single cigarette protruding from one of their orifices (Searle 2015). *The Guardian* has lauded the exhibition with praise, awarding it four stars out of a possible five, noting that Lucas relies on the element of surprise and yet somehow she gets away with it time and time again. This display of “pervery and pleasure in a sea of custard” (Searle 2015) is Britain’s contribution to the Biennale, a display of artworks gathered according to nation-states which converge in Venice on a bi-annual basis. Awards are presented at the Biennale, fueling competition amongst participating countries, all competing for the prestigious distinction and bragging rights.

III



In Galt, the Army Cadets—known as 21 Royal Highland Fusiliers of Canada Royal Canadian Cadet Corps (21 RHFC RCACC)—maintains a strong public presence and is supported by the Canadian Armed Forces, but remains a not-for-profit organization dependent on donations. They are responsible for organizing and administering the annual Remembrance Day ceremony which takes place at the Galt War Memorial; the cenotaph becomes the primary backdrop for the procession. The history of the Army Cadets in Canada is

largely tied to the preparation of young men for war through military exercises and training, where enrolment significantly increased during both World Wars when Canada served as a crucial ally to Britain.

Across from the cadet armoury on Ainslie Street was a store called **Crazy Bill's**, which existed for a few years and had closed sometime between October 2011 and August 2013. The store was one in a series of a small chain that sold bongos, vaporizers, rolling papers, and all things related to "cannabis culture." Above the front door, the store sign sported an illustration of Crazy Bill himself, rendered in nationalist red and white, his hairline receding, goatee and sunglasses exuding an essence of laid back *cool*. The store itself had barred windows and low lighting, warding away any unintended customers while obscuring regulars who would frequent the place for supplies. Upon my discovery at the cenotaph I was reminded of Crazy Bill's, as the store had also sold a wide range of novelty items—perhaps even rubber naked torso lighter covers.

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Visa Points and Bell Curves *“Mass Arrivals” and migrants* *who don’t make the grade*

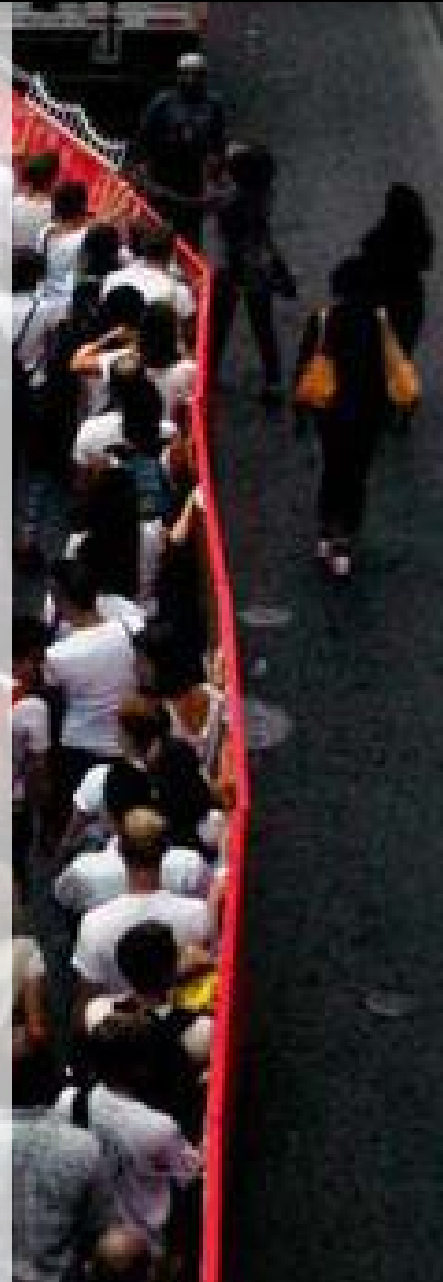
WRITTEN BY TARA ATLURI, WITH INSIGHTS FROM FARRAH-MARIE MIRANDA

The mass, the multitude, the rabble, the people. They gather, they rise, dialogue, dissent, acting as spectacles of fascination and fear. In times of common-sense individualism, Slavoj Žižek suggests that the most ultimate freedom lies in the freedom not to be harassed; so he asks, what can we learn from considering forms of collective assembly (Žižek 2008)?

Mass Arrival was a public performance and art installation held at Whippersnapper Gallery in Toronto, Canada in September, 2013, created by the Mass Arrival art collective: Farrah Miranda, Graciela Flores, Tings Chak, Vino Shanmuganathan, and Nadia Saad. The project involved a group of white-bodied persons who appeared in the structure of a boat in the streets of downtown Toronto following the hysteria that emerged after the 2010 arrival of the MV *Sun Sea*, a boat of Tamil migrants fleeing genocide. The public rhetoric concerning “swarms” of brown bodies was juxtaposed with the mass of white people in the boat, reflective of the haunting arrival of white colonial settlers who now appear as the norm in Canada and the rest of **Turtle Island**. The staging of *Mass*

Arrival offered a chance for the public to consider the relationship between the arrival of the MV *Sun Sea* and the passing of stringent legislation pertaining to migration by Conservative politicians. In conversation with *The Torontoist*, Farrah Miranda discusses the discursive construction of racialized Tamil migrants that supports xenophobic legislation:

The racist discourse around the arrival of the Tamil ship was captured through images . . . The government and media made references to people as cargo, as terrorists, as smugglers, as carriers of diseases . . . as everything but human beings seeking safety (Miranda quoted in Cole 2013).



The racialized, impoverished Tamil migrant was simply another “boat person,” part of the cargo, associated with a rabble that lies beyond the human.

SYMPTOMS AND SETTLERS

Global capitalism, white settler ideology, and the damned body of the migrant

In a state governed by **common-sense neoliberalism**, high security brought about by the global “war on terror,” and times of political conservatism the migrant becomes an example of a perpetually excluded marginalia. The experience of a migrant body in a neoliberal state finds resonance in Žižek’s theorization of the symptom. As follows, he states:

A symptom, however, is an element which—although the non-realization of the universal principle in it appears to hinge on contingent circumstances has to remain an exception, that is, the point of suspension of the universal principle: if the universal principle were to apply also to this point, the universal system itself would disintegrate (Žižek 2008, 127).

What Žižek describes is the presence of the radically excluded: those who remain out of the bounds of meritocratic, capitalist structures, to the point that their basic rights to life are suspended. Drawing on Hegel’s work regarding the dialectics of

universalism and the symptom, Žižek proceeds:

... the inherent structural dynamic of civil society necessarily gives rise to a class which is excluded from its benefits (work, personal dignity, etc.)—a class deprived of elementary human rights, and therefore also exempt from duties towards society, an element within civil society which negates its universal principle, a kind of ‘non-Reason inherent in Reason itself—in short, its *symptom* . . . (Žižek 2008, 127).

The arrival of the MV *Sun Sea* on Canadian shores highlighted the presence of an unspeakable symptom on “polite” white settler shores. From the colonial genocide of Aboriginals to the contemporary “war on terror” and increased production of stateless populations that exist within liminal spaces of humanity, fair has never been fair. Miranda states:

On the 12th of August, 2013, the anniversary of the 2010 MV *Sun Sea* arrival off the BC coast, we staged a mass arrival of our own. Forcing a plywood ship packed tight with approximately 200 white-identified bodies into an already crowded downtown intersection, we sought to subvert the colonial power of whiteness by



making it strange, spectacular and highly visible in the public imagination.’ Docked in front of the Hudson Bay Company’s flagship store, our ship served to disrupt, dislocate and problematize whiteness as the ‘natural backdrop to which Others arrive’ (Miranda 2014, 59).

It is perhaps interesting to think of the notion of the **revolving door immigration policy** in relation to Žižek’s symptom, as a continually recurring feature of phantasmatic universalism that keeps mythologies of white secular capital in place.

There is, perhaps, a perpetual ghost that haunts the colonial landscape—a recurring haunting that appears like a monster in the mirror, revealing the racist rage lurking beneath the apparent image of peace and order.

Original acts of colonial genocide that cause the Aboriginal to be a perpetual symp-

tom gesture to the failures of Universalist multicultural mythology, in which “diversity” is celebrated as saleable exoticism (Žižek 1997). This “multicultural” marketing scheme occurs at the same time as growing numbers of Indigenous women go “missing,” subject to brutal forms of sexual violence and ongoing racism. *Mass Arrival* visually carved out new markings on the landscape, leaving lingering images in the parchment that constitutes what Jacqui Alexander terms a palimpsest of colonial time and space (Alexander 2006).

ART SCHOOL IN THE STREETS

Public intellectual culture and public art

At the height of protests against the Euro zone’s austerity measures, Slavoj Žižek suggested that the immediacy of political concerns should not be met



with an abandonment of the patient act of intellectual reflection. Rather, he discussed the importance of the use of Kant's idea of "public reason" in navigating ongoing political struggle (Žižek 2010). One might consider public art as a form of intellectual culture divorced from institutionalised education; while ivory towers are policed based on "citizenship" and high tuition costs, *Mass Arrival* was a philosophical questioning regarding one's ethical responsibility to respond to racism, presented to the general public in the streets.

Visual cultures scholar Irit Rogoff discusses how curatorial and artistic practice offers an interesting model for thinking through some of the most pressing political issues of our time, such as national citizenship. Rogoff offers a poignant

questioning of how "smuggled" artistic practices comprising a huddled mass of ideas can lead to forms of "embodied criticality," which describes movement away from critique in favour of a more engaged criticality. Rogoff writes:

The term 'smuggling' here extends far beyond a series of adventurous gambits. It reflects the search for a practice that goes beyond conjunctures such as those that bring together 'art and politics,' or 'theory and practice,' or 'analysis and action' (Rogoff 2006, 1).

Rogoff suggests that criticality involves embodying a problem, not as an informed expert who feigns an authority that allows them to stand at a distance, but as a subject that lives within a problem.

The critique of the global “war on terror,” made from a place of theoretical inquiry, cannot account for the affective ways that “terror” comes to attach itself to Tamil migrants in Canada. Rogoff explains as follows:

While being able to exercise critical judgement is clearly important, it operates by providing a series of sign posts and warnings but does not actualise people’s inherent and often intuitive notions of how to produce criticality through inhabiting a problem rather than by analysing it (Rogoff 2006, 1).

The ways the artists who produced *Mass Arrival* inhabited the issue of racist paranoia succeeded in reflecting upon the complex subject position of politicized artists, activists, and feminists in Canada.

MASS HYSTERIA AND HYSTERICAL LAUGHTER

The Parody of Whiteness

The arrival of the racialized subject on the shores of the white settler colony is a theatrical arrival, haunted by the constant traffic of migration, xenophobia, and deportation that defines Canadian political history. And yet, the re-staging of this moment through the mis-recognition of whiteness as foreign, as a mass

of undifferentiated rabble, illustrates the possibilities of performance-based art in making the familiar seem strange. *Mass Arrival* is a parody of both the racist panic that surrounded the MV *Sun Sea* and the first moment of colonial contact. Whiteness—marked, named, and amassed through the installation of large numbers of white bodies in a boat—comes to be spectacular in its humorous banality.

In his essay “Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious,” Sigmund Freud discusses the relationship between the joke and the collective unconscious. The joke serves to both reveal and conceal the unconscious anxiety that curtails the dominant order (Freud 1960, 5-106). If according to Freud, a slip of the tongue or joke reveals deeper libidinal desires and drives, one can speculate that in *Mass Arrival* nothing is as simple as it seems. The white man’s body, figured within the socio-symbolic as representative of the phallic order of white male colonial power, is made to appear foreign and out of place. The uhomeliness of the Tamil migrant, depicted in mainstream media representations and deemed by conservative public outcry as unwelcome, is juxtaposed with images of the white settler (who was also not welcomed with open arms by Indigenous populations).

Ann Pellegrini draws on Freud’s writings



between the tendentious joke and satisfaction to argue:

‘Tendentious’ jokes make possible the satisfaction of an instinct (whether lustful or hostile in the face of an obstacle that stands in the way.) They circumvent this obstacle and in that way draws pleasure from a source, which the obstacle had made inaccessible (Pellegrini, 2001, 180).

Freud further writes that, “...the joke will evade restrictions and open sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible” (Freud cited in Pellegrini 2001, 180). The pleasures of laughing at the strangeness of white bodies was made possible by *Mass Arrival*, leaving spectators to experience a shared laugh and following sigh at the continuous obstacle of unspoken racism that often undercuts political discourses around migration. Miranda also writes of the relationship between emotion and creative process:

In 2010 . . . *The Globe and Mail* reported, “In an online survey of just over 1,000 Canadians, 48 percent of

those polled would deport the passengers from the Sun Sea, even if the refugee claims are found to be legitimate . . . Sitting in a friend’s living room ranting about the growing climate of fear and exclusion, I caustically remarked, “we should build a ship, fill it till it’s overflowing with white people and leave it in an intersection.” My friends and I chuckled at the concept . . . In my experience, it’s in moments of deep feeling that creativity has the chance to emerge (Miranda 2014, 59).

As Pellegrini suggests while discussing the work of feminist performance artist Holly Hughes, “In the space of...embodied performance, laughter re-turns to the fresh work of renewing and remaking a social world” (Pellegrini, 2001, 189). The use of parody to unmask the banal truths of racism is strengthened by a resilient refusal to play the victim, and to laugh in the face of great odds. Indeed, comedy often borders on tragedy.

Welcome, home?!



TARA ATLURI has a PhD in Sociology and is currently a Lecturer at OCAD University in Toronto, Canada. She previously worked as a researcher with *at the Open University in the United Kingdom*. As part of her involvement with Oecumene she conducted research regarding gender and social movements in the Indian subcontinent. She joined Oecumene as part of a postdoctoral project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

FARRAH-MARIE MIRANDA's artworks emphasize the power of ordinary people to enact change. Drawing on a decade of organizing within migrant justice movements, Farrah-Marie founded and co-directed *Mass Arrival* in 2013. The project mobilizes public interventions into the discourse of illegality surrounding migrant boat arrivals to the West. Acclaimed for its synthesis of performance, new media, and the law, *Mass Arrival* has exhibited internationally. Reviews of Farrah-Marie's work have been featured in publications as diverse as *Canadian Theatre Review*, *Canadian Art Magazine*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Torontoist*, *FUSE Magazine*, *This Magazine* and in the anthology, *Wildfire: Art as Activism*. Farrah-Marie's writing appears widely, including the book, *Art in the Wake of the Komagatamaru: Transpacific Migration, Race and Contemporary Art*.

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