

The Re-Socialization of Art?

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It is somewhat ironic that I've been invited to deliver the keynote talk in a conclave entitled "Insolent Dialogues," as I've endeavored over the past few years to become less insolent in both my private and professional affairs. Apparently, I have failed, since I am here with you for this conference.

Yet, we must learn from our failures, and as one of my favorite fortune cookies recommended: *success is going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm.*

This talk is a modified (and reduced) version of my essay, "Transitory Agencies and Situational Engagements: The Artist as Public Interlocutor," produced for the *[Situational] Public* book, a reflection on inSite_05 Interventions, which was published in 2006. My talk, by extension, also contains some questions that suggest a direction for the development of a symposium in 2007 that will examine the complexities of artistic and architectural engagements in the public sphere.

It is central to democracy that the public sphere and public domain (whether we are referring to artistic, intellectual and other cultural activities for civic benefit, or to various forms of political organization) remains an actively contested territory, particularly if we are interested in engaging the imaginations of distinct "publics" so that they use their right to influence the social-political space of their cities, rather than existing as a phantom presence or silent majority consumed exclusively by daily rituals of work, money, family, real estate and cultural tourism.

I've developed some questions that I will return to in various ways and forms throughout today's talk:

- 1.** How are urban territories re-activated through the transitory agencies and situational engagements of artists, architects and other cultural producers, and is it possible to track the effects or reverberations of such acts, particularly when such art practices are often based on ephemeral events, even calculated material disappearances of art works?
- 2.** Given that there is no theoretical or practical consensus on what constitutes "the public" and "public space," in what ways have artists contributed to re-defining these properties of the urban domain?
- 3.** Where are the borders—at once real and theoretical, material and psychological—that constitute the interstitial zones between "the private" and "the public" within distinct urban contexts?
- 4.** How do we navigate across the different boundaries that segregate various audiences, publics, constituencies within mega-cities comprised of multiple

ethnic, ideological, generational, cultural groups? And, how do artists and other cultural producers develop new communication tools to engage more diverse constituencies and publics, in order to re-activate alternate forms of urban citizenship?

5. Is it still possible to claim space in the public domain, in order to produce, even temporarily, a new condition of public space that is transformative (along political, ideological, perceptual and other lines) for citizens or in collaboration with citizens?

6. If artistic, architectural and other types of cultural interventions in city-spaces constitute a kind of urban acupuncture (an expression used to describe a phase in the urban development of Barcelona), what is the underlying condition that requires treatment, beyond the symptoms of an increasingly restricted and restrictive public domain?

7. How have historical definitions of “public art,” “site-specificity” and “relational aesthetics” been transformed in recent years, perhaps leading to the evolution of artistic practices that are based more clearly upon models/strategies of social-responsiveness and symbolic/real collaboration, in which the artist functions as a facilitator, intermediary, interlocutor, culture-expert, even business partner, to help engineer an alternative proposal for resolving “real-life” conditions?

8. What does it mean for artists and other cultural producers to intervene in or interrupt the flows and patterns of daily life within today’s cities? And does the public—the citizens of a particular city—actually pay attention? If not, are new strategies of communication necessary?

9. What are our expectations (in terms of social effect) as to artistic infiltrations, interventions or interruptions that claim to have a socially responsive dynamic of engagement?

10. Can artists, architects and other cultural producers still apply critical pressures upon the regulated spaces of cities in such a way as to challenge certain normative ways of living, seeing and thinking for the inhabitants of cities?

11. Are such artistic engagements and cultural interventions a means of promoting another kind of citizenship, wherein there is an interface between cultural producers and other publics that triggers enhanced forms of political responsibility?

12. If it is true that the public domain, as well as our domains of privacy (whatever is meant by “public” and “private” today), has become an increasingly securitized, over-regulated sphere of municipal controls in U.S. cities, what is the role (and responsibility) of artists, architects, urbanists and others in questioning such developments?

13. Is it tenable to act with impunity, without seeking permission, when producing artistic and other cultural interventions in cities?

14. Or, is it the obligation of artists and architects (given their distinct modes of cultural operation) to develop partnerships with individuals and institutions, involving a complex web of municipal negotiations, in which compromise is a

necessary component of the process, and permission an ultimate prerequisite to enunciating a work in the public domain of the city?

Where, then, to begin again?

With the vexing issue of how we might begin to trace the repercussions, the reverberations, of creative acts upon the fabric of cities and upon the imaginations of citizens?

Or, prior to that, how is it possible to make a claim for art’s material, symbolic, ideological, political or libidinal viability in relation to mundane life-circumstances? Through the reconsideration of various models of *socially responsive* practice?

With the disappearance of art’s materiality into networked flows of social encounters? Or, the re-distribution of cultural production into the flows of trans-urban environments, through processes of cooperation, collaboration, negotiation, infiltration and intervention?

Do city-based curatorial initiatives and art projects (whether sponsored by municipalities, private and corporate sources, or synergies between various financial and political supports) function to induce citizens to re-imagine their relationship to lived urban territories?

Alternatively, do we restart with questions of readership, audience, collaboration and participation?

Likewise, who formed the audiences for inSite_05’s Interventions, and how did these receivers collaborate in the formation of possible significations? Perhaps through a form of participatory spectatorship in the process of encountering the transient events constructed by the participating artists and architects, as these situations unfolded over the course of four weekends from late summer 2005 through late fall 2005?

Those practitioners, curators, organizers, intellectuals and others who have intervened with such questions probably understand that they —we— are at once privileged and marginalized, relevant and irrelevant (immaterial), safely ensconced and vulnerable, talking to ourselves as much as to others, searching for even a fugitive consequentiality in the face of pressures to behave all too politely. Yet, are we rehearsing strategies that ensure the exclusivity of our specialized cultural enclave? Or do we have the unbroken faith that certain artistic practices really do trigger unexpected transformative moments at some point down the line of communicative social encounters, potentially expanding our discursive interactions and publics?

Where to commence, once again?

At the beach in Playas, outside Tijuana, on a hot August day, bodies melting in the sun, watching a gringo get shot from a cannon over the dilapidated yet threatening metal fence that separates Mexican sand from U.S. sand, and in the process, transecting a group of psychiatric patients staging their version of a political demonstration? Here,

perhaps, in Javier Téllez's *One Flew Over the Void* project, does the spectacle dissolve into the event, and the event into something more ephemeral—the product of a process that momentarily creates a space of creative impunity and of ethical inquiry (regarding the nature of Téllez's collaboration with the patients) that is only made possible by a complex network of institutional negotiations and permissions. We all flew over that border on that sun-drenched inaugural afternoon, but did we all land in the safety of a net(work) of spectators?

With more basic questions concerning the history of site-specificity, artistic engagements with public space and urban social territories, the complexities of artistic research and collaboration, or the conceptual vicissitudes of process-oriented artworks?

Or rather, at a moment of transaction: exchanging a copy of your house key for a stranger's key, releasing your suspicion just long enough to allow the possibility of someone else crossing into your enclave without permission? To re-imagine—as Paul Ramírez-Jonas might have desired for us through his *Mi Casa, Su Casa* project—questions of trust and community. Further, the more we securitize the boundaries that putatively separate us from others—whether in terms of official national borders or gated private communities—the more distrust, fear and suspicion is generated: a potentially endless cycle. For those who exchanged the key to their own home for that to someone else's home, this symbolic act of trust temporarily suspended the cycle of distrust and fear, a kind of post-utopian rupture in which normative controls were abandoned, perhaps only to return the next morning.

Have we reached a new phase in the development of art and architectural projects that operate on liminal levels, like the production of critical shadows, rumors, distinct urban mythologies, silent resistances?

Transmitting a rumor about one city or the other city without recognizing that particle of information as a rumor, yet participating in the circulation and dissemination of the rumor nonetheless. Måns Wrangé's *The Good Rumor Project* is an insertion of dual rumors into the stream of transnational communications and miscommunications about Tijuana and San Diego, and might be understood as a way to produce unusual linguistic slippages and spillages, transgressions of stereotypical (rhetorical) representations of urban lives. Language, itself, as a constituent element of public space, a benevolent viral agent infiltrating networks of social exchange.

You encounter an unusually designed sneaker while perusing a hip store in downtown San Diego, and while in the process of deciphering its iconography, you notice that there is a map of the border between Tijuana and San Diego imprinted within the shoe. Judi Werthein's *Brinco*, a sneaker designed as a practical navigation system for border-crossers, and as an index of the globalized relations of labor and production that are ultimately connected to the social, political and subjective complexities of migration and immigration, gains *ambulatory* symbolic power through its status as a

critical design object camouflaged as a normative product of consumer society... or is it the other way around? At another location, now in Tijuana, mere feet from the border near the dry riverbed, these same shoes are distributed to migrants endeavoring to cross illegally into California territory, perhaps for the first time, or perhaps to rejoin their families. What did the migrants make of the sneakers? Will they be empowered through the act of wearing these utilitarian-critical-metaphorical artifacts, or become actors in a transmission of cultural meanings and values beyond their scope of understanding? And if it is both, and more, aren't such complexities and contradictions truly provocative?

A delicate alteration in the established flows of informal economic systems that already cross-pollinate with official structures...

... generating a hybridized mesh of economic transactions and social interactions?

Or, in a Tijuana shopping mall, on a warm Saturday evening, you might be selecting the design for a new shirt, the chosen pattern silk-screened as you wait within the framework of a temporary outdoor clothing shop? What is this establishment? Is it an entrepreneurial endeavor, a cultural project, or something else? You might ask related questions encountering the same types of clothing products within the context of a La Jolla clothing store, such as... who produced these designs? This is *La Tienda de Ropa (The Clothes Shop)*, a project by the Tijuana-based Bulbo collective, which has been consistently engaged in the orchestration of events, radio and television shows, among other projects, that respond to the dynamics of youth culture(s) within TJ. For their Interventions project, Bulbo developed a complex process of collaboration with individuals from diverse economic and social backgrounds in Tijuana, and worked with them to develop a new clothing line—designs that were arrived at through an indexing, distillation and translation of observations of particular locations in the city. In a sense, Bulbo—a “localized” cultural collective—became temporarily “de-localized” through their re-inscription within the institutional frame of inSite_05, yet the multilayered tactics of their project returned them, in a sense, to local communities.

It is necessary to be transparent about the trajectory of my engagement with inSite_05 Interventions. In the winter of 2003, at a meeting in New York City, the artistic director of inSite_05, Osvaldo Sánchez, first approached me to engage as one of the interlocutors (a phrase that he proposed) for the Interventions component of the exhibition. He introduced the basic framework of his methodology in relation to past versions of inSite. My interest was activated, yet I didn't entirely understand why he had approached me, a New Yorker, to engage in (post)border artistic engagements within the environs of Tijuana-San Diego.

It is from the urban environs of NYC—a city-space that has become the homogenized extrusion of hypostatized late-capitalist desires, perhaps the incarnation of another phase of enlightened decadence that some believe may be a premonitory sign of the decline of this so-called Empire—that I have been embedded within a

fabric of contradictory social, ideological, psychological, cultural and class relationships that cannot be easily sorted out.

Sánchez and I would meet again some months later in Mexico City to continue the discussion—for instance, in the context of the restaurant Los Almendros, in Polanco. And although it still remained unclear to me as to what Interventions would become, I opened myself to the process.

Interlocution was not a notion that I had previously associated with an exhibition process: my mode of operation had usually been to conceptualize and organize exhibitions, primarily as an independent agent, wherein I privileged the (imagined) uniqueness of my curatorial framework as a means of distinction from the pack. My ambivalence regarding curatorial teams or committees was due to an anxiety about my “authorship” being consumed by bureaucratic protocols, and an uncertainty that anything of quality or relevance could be arrived at through collective decision-making (potentially involving debilitating compromises). Refreshingly, within Interventions, the interlocutors were not asked to function as a curatorial team, since Sánchez had already selected the artists, and his associate curators were assigned to the participants. Rather, our mode of operation was to offer a critical response to the evolution of the artists’ and architects’ projects for Interventions, from late 2004 through 2005. As interlocutors, we were at once inside and outside, within and without, at once complicit and exempt, engaging in subtle navigations through psychological, ideological, linguistic and cultural territories.

To function as an interlocutor within inSite_05 required one to become a kind of porous border territory of intermediation: negotiating as much with one’s own conflicted perspectives on the viability of art’s always tenuous negotiation with social space, politics, as with the doubts, hopes, skepticisms and idealisms of the other participants. Not an arbiter, but rather a generator of critical feedback, an occasional translator of possible meanings. The interlocutor sessions, in which not all of the artists participated (for logistical reasons due to their residency schedules), generated some truly engaging, and occasionally contentious, moments of discursive interaction—a provocative model for the conceptual development of an exhibition.

On a bus, in front of an audience (captive, yes, but curious) that included a few of the participating artists, one or two patrons, some cultural intellectuals, inSite organizers and others, architect and urbanist Teddy Cruz delivered, via microphone, a research-laden de-coding of TJ, which also transmitted his political-ethical commitment to developing alternative architectural engagements within this complex and challenging urban territory. At some point in Tijuana, the bus stopped, we were asked to disembark and our gazes were directed toward what appeared, at least to me, to be a kind of densely organized *favela*, or shantytown, constructed from materials discarded within, and recycled from, the urban landscape. This was a kind of dilapidated instant-neighborhood, a grouping of informal architectures that constituted an apparently

unregulated, and not necessarily sustainable, urban habitat produced through survival tactics. Predictably, I was disturbed not only by the living conditions of the inhabitants, but by my own complicity as an observer of what appeared to be a third-world environment, at once experiencing the pangs of residual (gringo?) liberal guilt, and confused about what I was supposed to do with this (counter-?)anthropological experience. Take a picture? Could this become one of the potential settings for an artist’s Intervention within inSite_05? The platform of a community-based engagement designed to improve conditions on the ground? Although I was inspired by Cruz’s discourse and commitment, I was also skeptical about my own presence in this situation (perhaps typical of a New Yorker’s self-protective caution).

So I endeavored to utilize this experience to initiate a process of building immunity to the creeping disease of demoralization and even cynicism that afflicts those of us who have begun to lose the ability to operate beyond our own limited self-interests within the context of the art world. For those of us who have begun to lose the ability to imagine that art practices, curatorial organization and related cultural labor might occasionally have the ability to interrupt the normative patterns of daily human traffic, the habits of mind, even for just a brief moment. To what extent does one’s primary locus of habitation inflect upon one’s imaginary and practical projection of what is possible... for example, in relation to the potentialities of context-responsive art practices? Ironically, in the mega-metropolis of New York City, it is easy to be cut off from the world, even though there is a persistent belief that New York *is* the world, and not merely in that quaint historical sense of the grand cosmopolitan blender of multiple immigrant populations, or the postulation that inevitably, everything of cultural importance flows or transits through the urbane filter of NYC.

Within disparate cities in the U.S. such as New York and San Diego (a condition amplified since 9.11), we understand that “public space” has become something of a *readymade* domain: over-regulated, patrolled, increasingly securitized and surveilled, a placeholder for the eventual arrival, or appearance, of what might be described as “public art.” These days, there is an excruciatingly careful, tricky, deferential process of negotiation with municipal agencies, political leaders and private/corporate sponsors that must be cultivated as a prerequisite for gaining temporary or enduring permissions to segments of public space, whether we are referring to public art organizations or to city-based exhibitions that have utilized the city as a platform for the development of art projects. “Public space”—certainly within the U.S.—is normatively defined and identified as an outdoor location (a sidewalk, a building façade) or an interior space trafficked by numerous pedestrians, that can be made ready to *receive* either pre-existing, modifiable or newly commissioned works... putatively “public” artworks. In general terms, the mega-city becomes a platform for the positioning of works within specific urban locations, works which often function as representational signifiers within, and in relation to, an urban scape. Meaning is generated for, and is transmitted

in relation to, citizens (those who comprise multiple “publics”) through encounters with works in the fabric of the city. The encounters constructed for these urban citizens, these average viewers/passersby, are usually passive in character, although opportunities for more “interactive” or “participatory” engagements occasionally arise. The public becomes an audience, perhaps only temporarily, at these encounter-moments, yet is this public-as-audience activated in any substantial way? And, for that matter, where have the spaces for *acts of social impunity* gone?

Do the various forms of “public art” or even socially responsive practices (constructed as they are through a network of obligatory permissions) constitute an imaginary space of impunity... perhaps, vicariously, for the citizen? And what of the environs of Tijuana, in which questions of space, of publics, might be more complicated, perhaps less regulated, a peculiar interpenetration of formal and informal economies, habitats, legalities, and identities? An opportunity for intervention? The claiming of spaces of impunity, with or without permission? Or, is this the rhetoric of a misguided neo-utopianism?

Although the San Diego-Tijuana border environs have been the primary organizing force of previous incarnations of inSite, it is with Interventions that the border—at least in a curatorial-theoretical sense—has become an increasingly figurative presence, an increasingly dematerialized territory of investigation, in both theoretical and practical terms. To invoke a central precept articulated by the artistic director of inSite_05, Osvaldo Sánchez, the emphasis shifted towards thinking of the con-urban environs of greater Tijuana and San Diego as a *liminal* zone of continuous flows and counter-flows. Sánchez sought to amplify the potentiality of process as a curatorial and artistic methodology—even, in a sense, *the process of process*, in both theoretical and practical terms.

And, significantly over and above this, to coax the Interventions participants to consider the notion of *public as a process*.

The artists and architects who participated in Interventions sought to conceptualize and implement unprecedented modes of exploring territorial complexities without offering a *representational fetish* of the border as a literal boundary separating/joining the two nation-states. This is not to suggest, however, that the border is no longer present to us as a demarcated territory, or that it is completely absent from the considerations (and eventual projects) of participating artists and architects. How could it completely disappear from view, in either theoretical or pragmatic terms? Even those participants who utilized the territory of the border area in a more situationally specific way, such as Téllez’s human cannonball event on the beach at Playas, managed to defer from a representational re-codification of the boundary. How? On one level, quite straightforwardly, by not littering the area, even temporarily, with objects that could be readily, or even fugitively, identifiable as *public art sculptures*. I am thinking, as one example, of Bradford’s shopping carts deployed within the San Ysidro

area as part of the existing *maleteros* system, Wrangle’s dissemination of reciprocal good rumors about San Diego and Tijuana through a network of pre-selected groups of individuals (nodes), and Wertheim’s distribution of utilitarian-aesthetic wearable cultural products designed to agitate.

With regard to Sánchez’s curatorial frame (in particular his ruminations on conditions of invisibility and notions of “public”), one of the more perplexing yet thought-provoking experiences that I can recount concerns the São Paulo-based artist Rubens Mano, a participant in Interventions. I met Mano only once, at an informal lunch break on my first journey out to San Diego in 2003 as a respondent for the Conversations event. He was engaged in preliminary research for his project, *Visible*, and we exchanged a few pleasantries. After that encounter, both Mano and his *Visible* project remained fundamentally *invisible* to many of us who sought to locate it as a materialized phenomenon... beyond rumor and innuendo. Invisibility sometimes has a way of generating a certain degree of mystique and intrigue, without question. Mano’s project might be emblematic—inadvertently or strategically—of the intriguing contradictions of Interventions: an artistic intervention into the liminal territories of the transurban region of Tijuana-San Diego, that virtually disappeared from view. And, in a sense, it might have been conceptualized and designed to disappear from the view of normative art-seeking audiences... a type of resistance to visibility that also functioned, metaphorically, as a divergence from institutional visibility, or at least emblematic of an anxiety about institutional affiliation and identification. Was this a planned, strategic disappearance into the liminal social sphere, or a *tactical withdrawal from presence*?

Have we entered the realm of *the work of art in the age of appearances and disappearances*, visibility and invisibility, re-surfacing and de-surfacing at tactical moments of engagement... and disengagement? When can we consider a project to be developed as a strategy of calculated disappearance? A programmed obsolescence? Yes, perhaps, I am invoking a contradictory scene, in which our desire for art and architecture to have a socially engaged vocation is often thwarted by our own limitations as to what might constitute engagement, or intervention. And, really, what do we want art to accomplish? Is the engineering of a public experience, a social interaction, sufficiently differentiating? Testing, perhaps, the viability of artists and their work to activate new relations (symbolic, material, semiotic, spiritual, ideological) between “people” and their context?

For Interventions, the preferred modes of operation among artists and architects included: the staging of a transitory event, the cultivation of ephemeral collaboration with citizens on “personal” and “political” levels, the insertion of a linguistic unit into the flow of communication, a participatory inscription in an existing subsystem of commerce and survival, the production of a commodity with dual functions and with multiple ideological identities (depending upon context of use).

To a certain extent, Måns Wrangle's project for Interventions, *The Good Rumor Project*, alludes to this condition, as he utilized notions adapted from "rumor theory" to develop focus groups in both San Diego and Tijuana to generate a good rumor about each city. Two rumors, apparently circulating through these territories (and perhaps beyond) for nearly one year, with only the participating "nodes" knowing the rumors, and the rest of us perhaps having absorbed the rumors at a liminal level... the invisible contact point between speech acts, social interaction and the detonation of meaning at interstitial moments. Wrangle selected one "public" location for the visual re-presentation of this conceptually complex yet utterly accessible project: a promotional video document (produced in the style of a corporate or social-scientific report) discreetly displayed on the side of a hotel building in downtown San Diego, a gesture in the direction of a didactic projection of the project's framework into the street—the urban territory conventionally associated with the public space suitable for "public art." But, of course, Wrangle's project actually demanded a very different conception and experience of the "public" space wherein "public art" can be conjugated: conjugated, in this instance, through social communication, like a viral mode of contamination, linked to Wrangle's judicious application (and testing) of rumor theory. Beyond research, conceptualization, organization and implementation, this is where the "art" is: at those interstitial moments of contact, within the liminal, beyond appearance, seeking another mode of post-representational economy, somehow enunciated through social flows. Yet I am still in the dark; I remain ignorant of the actuality of these rumors; the information remains withheld, and with frustration there comes resignation to the notion that we don't need to know everything, to understand all. Just to smile, and imagine what the rumors might be.

Returning to questions of audience(s), reception, communication and translation, and to another moment at the initial Garage Talks event during the opening weekend of inSite_05: Paul Ramírez-Jonas offered a rather poignant meta-commentary on his presence at this panel discussion, and rather than explaining his project to the audience, he proceeded to articulate, persuasively, that it was not appropriate for him to explain anything to this particular audience, because they were not the intended receivers of his project. This kind of strategic refusal by Ramírez-Jonas actually would make more sense to me a few months later, when I finally had an opportunity to witness one of the final presentations of his *Mi Casa, Su Casa* project, which he had been offering at different locations throughout the San Diego and Tijuana environs (including a women's prison in Tijuana). The version I saw was presented at a college in San Diego. Ramírez-Jonas presented a sequence of images, discussed issues related to the conceptual development of his project, and then invited the audience that evening (as he had been doing at each of his presentations of *Mi Casa, Su Casa*), to consider giving him a copy of a key to open the door of their homes, which he would duplicate immediately onsite, and give to another member of the audience in exchange for the

key to unlock a door in their home, and so on and so forth. If one were to engage in this symbolic and actual exchange of keys (as I did), you would receive from the artist a memento, a gift memorializing this unusual contract in trust, an artifact designed by the artist: a key engraved on one side with the representation of two hands overlapping, and on the other, with two hands holding keys, suggesting the kind of bond of trust established at that moment between two individuals, involving the sharing of instruments to facilitate mutual transition (mutual trespassing) through portals of privacy in the city, suburbia, and beyond. To me, *Mi Casa, Su Casa* is fundamentally about trust, community, security, the safety of the private domain, the regulated conditions of public social space (versus private property, or the ownership of one's space) and how it might be possible to intervene actively in compelling individuals, and by extension, communities, to reconsider their trepidation about the person living next door, across town in another economic enclave, or even on the other side of the border.

In more general terms, Interventions incited us to think again about the viability of art—whatever art actually is today—and to penetrate into the social fabric of life in some deeper, more resoundingly effective way than at any previous moment, perhaps to the extent that it disappears or evaporates into the regulated and unregulated flows of local, regional and transnational systems. Like a rumor, an urban legend or myth, a whispered possibility, a folkloric narration: Did you hear about that artist's project, perhaps months after the "show" closed, through mass media networks? Did it navigate the streams of our social unconscious in such a way that we were not even aware that it was in our midst... yet it triggered certain mutations in our patterns?

Perhaps this is the effort to generate, or facilitate, a condition of *aesthetic instrumentality* so as to trigger amplified levels of subjective political agency that ultimately connects many of the Interventions projects.

So, how to conclude, or, to begin again? With even more questions?

Maybe, through our engagement with Interventions, we are seeking some redemption from the supposed social irrelevance of art, from the anxiety that even as art appears to approach a more intimate "relational" coupling with the real, it slips further away from consequentiality.

Or, returning to the broader, paradigmatic, questions, such as:

What does it mean for artists, today, to "intervene" in public, within public space, in relation to distinct publics? *What is public?* And, why should various "publics" be interested in an exhibition project such as Interventions, beyond the relatively insular contingents of cultural intellectuals and producers who have become engaged with the inSite milieu? Why should these issues be important for us today, when we could just as easily devote our energy and time to maintaining

our lifestyle and seeking investment opportunities? Who do we think we are, anyway, with our claims, petit or grand, for art's potential reconnection with economic, ideological and cultural narratives and social flows, with the life and death of our cities? What do we want from those publics that might prefer to reject these claims, or merely to ignore them?

We enter into these kinds of ruminations, which are not merely rhetorical, because of a curiosity that compels us to test the possible reconstitution of the artist's civic role. There is no need to agree upon one definition of the public, of public space, of the social, of engagement, of intervention, of infiltration, or commitment, or struggle. Just to be straightforward about our objectives, desires, limitations, dreams, pragmatics, and the many complexities and contradictions encountered along the path of most resistance. Of course, if one believes that it is necessary to apply pressure upon habits of mind, upon conventions of idea and action, resistances should be anticipated, if not welcomed.

Yet we need to be realistic about what and who our various audiences and/or publics are, while seeking connections with the imaginations of broader constituencies, come what may. How do we remobilize our artistic, cultural, and intellectual activities as a force of reconnection, but not necessarily reconciliation, with ideologically disparate audiences, publics and receivers? A new ethics of engagement may seem reactionary, particularly if we still endorse the notion that artists have the capacity, perhaps even the responsibility, of blasting ethical considerations. Yet what is the alternative?

One of my general concerns throughout my involvement with Interventions has been the always vexing question of how to connect the dots, so to speak, between these artistic/architectural interventions, the attendant range of theoretical discourses that constitute the intellectual framework on the border/post-border condition, and those diverse audiences/constituencies that might constitute something called a *public*. This relation seems quite unpredictable, difficult to “map,” impossible to control, or dangerous to anticipate. But how might we speak more effectively across the discursive borders in relation to how inSite presents itself, so to speak, to multiple

publics? What of the various audiences, publics, constituencies: what is their relationship to these kinds of discourses and practices? How do we find ways to effectively translate certain kinds of complex projects to the citizens of a given city, or to the cultural tourists who fly in for a few days? Not a new issue, certainly, and one which often gets left behind, perhaps, as a result of the frustration at not being able to discern the “effect” of artistic/cultural interventions. Should we endeavor to further develop this skill-set, in order to gain a better and more realistic understanding of the consequences of our activities, our commitments? Are such questions too “pragmatic”? Did Interventions function as a tool in this process, as a platform for the initiation of such questions?

I would propose that inSite in general, and Interventions in particular, gained its primary agency in terms of the question of how it might still be possible to be committed in today's art culture, to continuously reinvent a political agency. Interventions, ultimately, was an exhibition project that generated more questions than answers, revealing itself to be a living contradiction, in the best possible sense. A dense network of interrelationships, provoking a re-engagement with questions regarding the commitment of cultural workers. The function and role of artists as producers of *platforms and situations* that test new possible relations between artwork and receiver (or, between artwork and receiver in a participatory and collaborative process of meaning), and the dynamics of art practices dematerializing and rematerializing within domains of social life.

Ultimately, all of our nuanced discourses, best intentions, ethical reflections, moral dilemmas, strategic and tactical choices, and real and apparent ideological and political commitments, must be tested in relation to our actions in the social realm of the city, on the streets, in daily encounters, in other moments of urban interface... even with others who may not share our values, ideologies, aspirations—or, our contradictions. As cultural producers, do we need to be on the frontlines of social struggles, pushing the limits of public space, wherever this might take us—even if it means confronting our own contradictions?