Intimate

EDITORS

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Introduction

Steven Lam

The intimate is one of proximity and familiarity. As a relational category, intimacy is a quality of closeness, attachment, and belongingness. To be intimate with someone or some thing is to have an innermost connection. Intimacy, or intimus, designates interiority or an inward sensation, as in under one's skin. To intimate is also to communicate with a hint, to imply subtly. This process requires a codified reception, a circle of acknowledgement and recognition. Intimacy not only designates issues pertinent to the discussion of home, sexuality, identity, the slippage between the private and public, but also relationships made out of kinship, friendship, and neighborliness.

What mobilizes an intimate attraction? What prompts someone to have such a deep connection? Can it be collectively produced? How can one locate intimacy in this time of hatred, fanaticism, and terror? Can intimacy arise out of estrangement? How can we discuss the politics of intimacy, an injunction to have a "face-to-face encounter with the Other" without reinforcing the various condemnations of what some theorists decry as the fallacy of the ethical turn?

To theorize a model of counter-intimacy one must work through the intricate processes of intersubjectivization (a psychoanalytic procedure that is neither objective nor subjective, but elaborates on the connectedness between the two). Adorno once lamented that the culture industry operates psychoanalysis-in-reverse. Focus groups monopolize on the slippery collapse between the interior and exterior avoiding the power of intersubjectivity. Intimacy has no borders or limits. Its interior folds into the exterior, weaving an infinite space in which apprehension cannot locate its demarcation. Following this topology, Lacan coined the neologism 'extimacy' (extimité) by attaching the prefix ex (from extérieur) to the French word intimite (intimacy). His concept, "extimacy," succinctly develops a model of psychoanalysis that breaks apart the "opposition between inside and outside, between container and contained." He wanted to theorize why one's 'intimate' feelings appear unfamiliar to us and additionally articulate the inverse: how our feelings can be externalized onto objects to such a degree that these emotions do not loose their intensity (the Other "is something strange to me, although it is at the heart of me"). Lacan's 'extimacy' presents the real in the symbolic. It is "just as much inside as outside, and the unconscious is not a purely interior psychic system but an intersubjective structure" ("the unconscious is outside").

Shifter's 11th issue re-narrativizes mechanisms of connectivity within this play of spatial destabilization. The editorial selection of the issue slides across various topical registers complicating notions of proximity, interiority and attachment by inserting the concept of intimacy into a different economy of associations — one pertinent to the shifting language of globalization and its post-colonial realities. Theoretical texts are placed within a field of images; each entry negotiates the processes of inter-subjectivity. Public space and real estate, conflict resolution and photography, psychoanalysis and love, surveillance and dance, education and community, among other contextual frames are discussed. The issue monopolizes on the slippery collapse between the interior and exterior avoiding the power of the couple, as well as the pitfalls of giving primacy to the authentic; it suggests that visual culture and artistic production offer insight into the representation of neighbor-love through a remapping of intimacy that pushes it beyond a private emotional ideal frequently upheld in neo-liberalism, to a zone that addresses our time of social upheaval marked by hatred, fanaticism, and vulnerability.


Psychasthenia: the care of the self

for Knut Åsdam

Simon Leung

If you were to enter,
turn to the right or turn to the left,
the others already there would instruct:
how to walk in the dark.

We walked down,
Bleecker Street station,
derground,
turn to the right or turn to the left,
his gait twice mine,
who walks, who follows?
I cannot read his stride.

He looked at me and said,
before we got onto the train,
“Bleecker Street, Hart Crane,
‘as quiet as you can make a man.’”

They say that day turns into night,
that it turns in an instant.
But a day does not turn,
I turn.

When language meets matter in a noun
(a line, a square, a cube, an I), is when
selves are remade,
the world relearned.
A day is night, a night is day,
lit up, returned.

There is the room: a forest inside
with nothing to live for, but
“forest” itself, like a noun,
to think with in a box,
to write with on a page.

So no, maybe
not a forest—a park, a garden, a path?
It lives only as a word, but I do not know the word.

With this, with him, our end foretold—
without words to name it,
without a sound,
was where he stopped,
where I kept walking.

What one cannot know is that the care of the self
begins with an injury older than the self.
Space contained or all-around,
only buttresses the question:
“am I someone or am I a thing?”
Am I… anything… to you?

You do not know, but I am nothing to you.
I am a picture in your surround, but I am nothing to you.
I do not know myself: I step back, shapeless.
I have no proposal: I do not know my self.
What good is a self that does not know its own Good?
There is no Good, we’ve lost the ground.

“Friendship.
That’s what I can offer,
I cannot offer any more than that,
right now.”

“You don’t mean right now, you mean not ever.”

“You’re right, I added that on at the end.”

At the end of a thought, you add another thought,
to delay, defer
my feelings.

Feelings are best not deferred.
Feelings need not be spared.
“Feelings are important.”

They say that darkness falls,
But darkness does not fall.
It does not.
I fall.

You need the pull of gravity
to walk a path,
within a square: falling leaves / budding grove /
the care of the self / the approach of the stranger / a mile in my shoes / I’m a stranger here myself.
What hits the gaze of others—that’s what confirms in the end: solitary strides, a unity of men.

I think I remember the glass box: brown, or black, as I think about it again. Was is darker than brown? Does light turn black grey, or more black? Does it filter or does it hide?

The dark is a camouflage, a mottled abstraction. At every point it can become a source of light, a potential dissolution of matter, omnipresent / rift air itself, you yourself, a / form / less / violence.

Light is not kind, light is the eruption of law, the other room (day).

In architecture, the rectangle, the grid, gives form function, light its reason—the alibi of clarity.

In the city where I used to live the solitary body moving through space is protected by the gaze of strangers—each gaze a gleam of light. But in the city where I now live... well, it's almost as though light saturates the self, and lit from all angles, it doesn't recognize itself anymore.

“Take care of yourself”

Maybe he said, “You, too,” I'm not sure.
A Case of Iconoclastic Cinephilia: Serge Daney’s “The Tracking Shot of Kapo” (1992) and the Politics of Extimacy

Soyoung Yoon

“let us abolish the images, let us save immediate Desire…”

Roland Barthes

1. The Tracking Shot as a Moral Affair? Two Scenes of Death

“’Just look at the shot in Kapo where Riva commits suicide by throwing herself on electric barbed wire: the man who decides at this moment to track forward and reframe the dead body in a low-angle shot – carefully positioning the raised hand in the corner of the final frame – deserves only the most profound contempt.’…”

…As soon as I read those lines I knew the author was absolutely right”: the French film critic Serge Daney opens his autobiographical essay with Jacques Rivette’s critique of Gillo Pontecorvo’s film Kapo (1960). After the abruptness of the “absolutely right” – a conviction in front of which we stop, waver, savor the temptation to agree and share the critic’s sense of sincerity, his fervor, his belief – Daney describes how ‘the tracking shot of Kapo’ became the principle of his own criticism. 2 The shot frames and re-frames the image, unflinchingly; it positions the spectator in a place of exteriority from where we look down upon the ‘object,’ a dead body, perhaps in indignation, but all the more assured about what we see, our right to see. The camera does not stumble – nor does the spectator and this is precisely the problem.

Daney offers another scene of death, the shot in Mizoguchi Kenji’s Ugetsu (1953), when another female character is killed, almost inadvertently, so much so that “the camera almost misses it.” 3 A woman, wearily walking away from her ransacked home, is attacked again by a group of starved, equally weary soldiers. As they stagger back and forth, slipping, sliding, falling over and over again, the struggle for survival becomes a struggle for balance, whether or not I live almost absurdly reduced to the simplicity of whether or not I can stand. They grasp at each other, gasping from exhaustion; even the weight of one’s own breath has become too much to bear. What we feel is a fatigue that does not spell out the action of ‘a woman is being attacked,’ but rather stammers, stubbornly hinting at something more. And as if the camera too is tired from the sight of war, it almost misses the moment when a soldier, tottering to stay on his feet with the support of his spear, turns to face the woman. Only when she crumbles to the floor do we ask, belatedly, is she dead? The shot trembles; we sense an off-screen presence that shudders as if in involuntary reflex to Mizoguchi’s revulsion against the absurdity of death in war, the absurdity of even this staged scene of death. ‘The shot is almost dissociated from the event, exhibiting not only the violence of the event, but also the violence that is implicit in our own look.’ Instead of an embalmed glance, this was a gaze that ‘pretended not to see,’ that preferred not to have seen and thus showed the event taking place as an event, that is to say, ineluctably and obliquely. 4 The tracking shot of Kapo, on the other hand, is “pornographic”; the brusque brutality of death embelished into a work of art, not an event that is caught “ineluctably and obliquely,” but rather a spectacle specifically staged for the delight of the spectator – for Daney, necrophilia in the name of ideology. 5

Though Daney shares Pontecorvo’s political commitment (rather than Mizoguchi’s conservatism), he denounces the filmmaker’s unequivocal eagerness to possess the image, to stamp the image with a statement. What is missing in the tracking shot of Kapo is the presence of the other, a sense of disturbance in our vision akin to the rustling of the branches or the sound of afootstep that surprises Sartre’s voyeur, making us aware not only of the vulnerability of our own look, but also of the existence of others. To briefly rehearse Jean-Paul Sartre’s critique of spectatorship (in Being and Nothingness (1943)): Through a keyhole (or the eye of the camera), the spectator watches, wholly absorbed by what we see. Suddenly, I sense the gaze of an other, a gaze that comes from where I do not or rather cannot look. The presence of the other punctures the voyeuristic pleasure of the viewer; it wrenches a gap, a hole, in the viewer’s visual field, destabilizes the spectator from his/her sense of visual mastery. Instead of simply ‘seeing’, I am also ‘seen’, part and parcel of the spectacle – or as Jacques Lacan would put it, I am in the picture. According to Daney, cinema came of age when it showed “how the sphere of the visible had ceased to be wholly available”: “There were gaps and holes, necessary hollows and superfluous plenitude, forever missing images and always defective gazes.” 6 And these gaps and holes, which suggest I see and I am seen, are exactly what are elided in the artistry of the tracking shot of Kapo.

2. Politics of Extimacy in the Alterity of the Image

Daney’s adamant refusal of the tracking shot of Kapo is a refusal to subdue and suppress

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2 Serge Daney, “The Tracking Shot of Kapo” (1992) in Postcards from Cinema, trans. Paul Douglas Grant (Oxford: Berg, 2007 [1994]), 16. Originally published in French in Trafic 4 (Paris: Fall 1992). The quotation from Jacques Rivette is cited from the June 1961 issue of Cahiers du cinéma. Daney points out that it is a film that he has never seen, but never forgotten: “I’ve seen it because someone showed it to me – with words.” Moreover, “at the time, this type of refusal was common. Looking at the raging and exasperated style of Rivette’s article, I sensed that furious debates had already taken place and it already seemed obvious to me that cinema was the echo box of all polemic. The war in Algeria was ending, and because it hadn’t been filmed, it brought suspicion to bear upon any representation of history. Everybody seemed to understand that things such as taboo figures, criminal aptitudes, and forbidden cuts existed – especially in cinema. Godard’s famous expression that tracking shot was a ‘moral affair’ was one of those truths that could no longer be questioned. Not by me anyway.”

The particular purpose of this paper is not only to point out what is at stake in Daney’s refusal of the tracking shot of Kapo, but also to point out why in today’s political-economy of the image, sadly, such conviction seems obsolete.

3 Daney, 26.
4 Daney, 26.
5 Daney, 24. "It’s the other pornography [in contrast to the unsublimated necrophilia of ‘concentration camp porn’] that always revolted me: the ‘artistic’ pornography of Kapo, or a little later, The Night Porter, and the other retro films of the 1970’s. To this consensual after the fact aestheticization, I would prefer the obstrusive return of the non-images in Night and Fog or the unfurling drives of Ilsa, She Wolf of the S.S., which I wouldn’t see. At least these films had the honesty to acknowledge the impossibility of telling a story, the stopping point in the course of history, when storytelling freezes or runs idle.” [my emphasis – especial emphasis on the word ‘consensual’]
6 Daney, 25.
what he calls “the alterity of the image”: the image’s affect, its ability to de-stabilize us, to reveal our vulnerability, our radical dependency on the other and therefore our responsibility to the other. The shot exemplifies the modern compulsion to see, that is, to simply see, an illusion that not only allows for the complete control over our perception – how I see, what I see – but also the foreclosure of our fundamental feelings of vulnerability via perception, as if to see is to know, knowledge itself solely defined within the domains of power. In other words, our radical dependency on the other is mis-recognized as one of dis-empowerment and, as our sense of powerlessness becomes more pervasive, we must strive to know, to know more. As the age-old proverb goes, the more you know, the more you know you ought to know – knowledge and the obligation to know, the compulsion for ever more knowledge. We set our sights on those dark corners of ourselves, a darkness too often displaced onto an other of a different class, gender, race or ethnicity, diminish the threat of their difference as something to be analyzed, categorized, stored safely away like a dusty old doll or fetish, a relic of our ignorance – or the darkness of the unconscious itself, pathologize its unruly irruptions in our day to day as something to be cured by the couch or the pill.

Here, the crux is the mis-recognition (méconnaissance), how our sense of powerlessness feeds off our self-definition as possessors of power. Thus, the more we possess, the more powerless we feel, with the de-territorializing logic of capital fueling the seeming irony of this closed circle. This is what Roland Barthes once criticized as the ethical question of our society in which “pleasure passes through the image,” all pleasure subsumed into the voyeuristic pleasure of the viewer and his/her sense of visual mastery: “not that the image is immoral, irreligious, or diabolic…but because, when generalized, the image completely de-realizes the human world of conflicts and desires, under the cover of illustrating it” [my emphasis].9 For Barthes, it is a society that consumes images instead of beliefs; instead of the all-seeing eye of some almighty god, it is the individual who is the supreme possessor of power, who is obliged to incessantly assert his/her authority by “producing a world that is without difference (indifferent), from which can rise, here and there, only the cry of anarchisms, marginalisms, and individualisms” [my emphasis].10 The ethical question is not only an ethics of our relation to the image, but also of our relation to being, our own as well as another’s. Today, in an increasingly more speculative economy than Barthes’, we face the paradox of an ever more aggressive individualism coupled with various, vehement cries for the return of the ‘Father,’ be it that of the State (in the form of ethnic nationalisms) or the Church (the case of religious fundamentalisms), etc. In short, the modern compulsion to see – an imperialist logic of vision, as it were – conflates the subject and the other, subdues and suppresses our radical dependency on the other, thereby constitutes the subject as consciousness of its self in its identity; it conflates the look and the gaze, subdues and suppresses the other’s presence, thereby positioning the subject as the ‘I’ who is in control over how I see, what I see, moreover an I who must always see more.

Daney’s demand for the alterity of the image, the urgency of his demand, is a response to the increasing invasiveness of the visual in our society of the spectacle, the proliferation of the media as well as the media’s sensorial shocks that are characterized by a lack of intimacy – or rather the ‘false’ intimacy of a society in which, as Sartre would say, “the individual, a solid and indivisible particle, the vehicle of human nature, resides like a pea in a can of peas: he is round, closed in on himself, uncommunicative.”11 Note the very structural mechanism of the spectacle (Guy Debord): fragmentation of everyday life and isolation of the individual among atomized masses are to be re-unified at the level of image, that is, a generalized image, an image shorn of its alterity. The proliferation of the media and its sensorial shocks de-sensitize rather than sensitize, render the spectator increasingly immune to the affect of the image: I nervously switch and turn in my seat, laugh, cry, perhaps even scream in terror, but I do not doubt my ability to see, my right to see, I am not estranged from my identification with the world I see, and, as I consume more and more images, I know, I know that ‘I’ know. What is at stake, then, is the strange intimacy of cinema and its own sensorial shock, an intensification of our bodily experience that leads not to a coherent consciousness of our ego, but rather to its shattering, the implication of the unconscious. What is at stake is an intimacy that counters the comfortable conformity of our residence as “a pea in a can of peas,” counters the alienation of our individual and collective agencies, the reficitation of subjectivity, psychological and political.

“Extimacy” is the word that Lacan coined for this strange intimacy, a collage of ‘exteriority’ and ‘intimacy’ through which the very distinction between the two terms are challenged. Extimacy defines how the unconscious is constitutive of the individual and the collective, the psychological and the social. It also critiques the self-possession of the

8 Jacques Lacan, in “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function.” (1949) explains that the subject acquires his/her initial sense of self through a mis-recognition (méconnaissance), instead of a fragmented body, the “finally donned armor of an alienating identity”; the sound, sturdy silhouette of his/her image, the reflection in the mirror, as it were. The key here being that this process is experienced as “a temporal dialectic” “whose internal pressure pushed from insufficiency to anticipation.”
9 Joan Copjec in her remarkable readings of Lacan succinctly sums this up as a transition from a question of force to power, of being to having – or more precisely, of having more of how the subject’s fundamental vulnerability, his/her anxiety, transforms through processes of socialization into the subject’s sense of guilt, the guilt of always missing the mark. See, especially, Joan Copjec, “May ‘68, The Emotional Month” in Lacan, the Silent Partners, ed. Slavoj Zizek (London: Verso, 2006), 90 ~ 114. Here, she quotes Steve Conner’s distinction of force vs. power: “For something we want to call a power, there is a notion of an agent that precedes and deploys the power, a who looming through the what. A force, by contrast, exerts itself, and exerts itself on itself.” For Copjec, guilt is a feeling in which a force internal to the subject is experienced as a power exercised on the subject by an external agency. In short, the subject shifts from the anxious lack of identity to the guilty loss of identity, an identity perceived as possessable as property. And the threat of an other of a different class, gender, race or ethnicity lies in that this other seems to possess an identity that I have lost, an identity that has been stolen from me.
10 Barthes, 119.
11 Jean-Paul Sartre, “Presentation” (1945) trans. Jeffrey Mehlman, in What is Literature? and Other Essays (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988). “Thus it was that, intent on destroying divine rights, the rights of birth and blood, the right of primogeniture, all those rights based on the notion that there are differences in men’s natures, the bourgeoisie confused its own cause with that of analysis and constructed for its use the myth of the universal [the myth of the individual in the Declaration of the Rights of Man]. Unlike today’s revolutionaries, they were able to achieve their goals only by abdicating their class consciousness: the members of the Third Estate at the Constituent Assembly were bourgeois precisely to the extent that they considered themselves to be simply men. A hundred and fifty years later, the analytic cast of mind remains the official doctrine of bourgeois democracies, with the difference that it has now become a defensive weapon.” [my emphasis]
subject and defines our relation to the other, our radical dependency on the other: how we are doubled by a strange yet intimate other, how at the very core of our being is something we cannot name, the sense of something always already so much more than the selves we own. Note how narcissism, one of the primary instances of your sense of self, is a situation in which you do not merely fall in love with an image of yourself, but rather with the promise of the image: the image seduces us with the anticipation of something more, “in you more than you.”

The concept of extimacy also challenges the ideological implications that support the separation between exteriority and interiority, between the public and the private. Erasing the presence of the strange yet intimate other, the dichotomy of the subject and his/her representation assumes a reciprocal relation through which the represented object, the image, only speaks to the subject – a fluid flow of information, as it were, without the combustible crackling of the medium, transmission without a trace of interference, the capitalist myth of perfect circulation. “The privilege of the subject seems to be established here from this bipolar reflexive relation by which, as soon as I perceive, my representations assume a reciprocal relation through which the represented object, the presence of the strange yet intimate other, the dichotomy of the subject and his/her separation between exteriority and interiority, between public and private. Erasing limits, that is, whether there are not “objects” that, by nature, cannot be appropriated, or more precisely that cannot be appropriated without a trace of interference, the capitalist myth of perfect circulation. “The privilege of the subject seems to be established here from this bipolar reflexive relation by which, as soon as I perceive, my representations belong to me,” Lacan says, “this belong to me aspect of representations, so reminiscent of the capitalist myth of perfect circulation.”

Furthermore, this form of ownership, Etienne Balibar argues, presupposes “the principle of total possession of objects”: every object as effectively appropriable “in the form of an exclusive disposal.” To own is the potential to use, to use up, the value of an object realized only in the moment of its consumption. Lacan agrees: the certainty of I know (or, in this case, I see), the certainty of being itself, reduces the subject to “a power of annihilation.” Note Walter Benjamin’s famous indictment of fascist aesthetics: “Humankind, which, once, in Homer was an object of contemplation for the Olympian gods, has now become one for itself. Its self-alienation has reached the point where it can experience its own annihilation as a supreme aesthetic pleasure.” Fascism sought to maintain the status quo of the interwar period, to refuse to change property relations with respect to the proletarian masses. Instead of acknowledging these newly emergent political subjects, fascism only offered them representation, that is, it molded the masses into the refined form of an ornament, compressing them into “an impenetrable, compact entity,” which, for Benjamin, was not a class, but merely a mass, “a can of peas.”

3. Image vs. Visual

Underlying Daney’s call for the alterity of the image is a politics of extimacy: an insistence on the affect of the image that resists all reciprocity, all exchange, and all appropriation into a totalizing point of view that would support the self-possession of the spectator, his/her sense of visual mastery. Daney distinguishes between the Image and the Visual. The Visual is the image shorn of affect, generalized into a cliché, a stereotype, reduced to the act of reading through which we see what we are supposed to read, “an optical verification of power.” The Image is “that which holds out against an experience of vision and of the Visual.” The Image is “the unattributable shot, shots that cannot be linked to a specific observer”; the unaccountable gaze of the other, the invisible yet palpable presence of the other that destabilizes us from our Olympian heights – for Benjamin, a “loosening” through which “the dead, undialectical opposition between individual and collective is abolished; for the comrade, it does not exist.”


13 Lacan, 81. “This is how the world is struck with a presumption of idealization, of the suspicion of yielding me only my representations...When carried to the limit, the process of this meditation, of this reflect- ing reflection, goes so far as to reduce the subject apprehended by the Cartesian meditation to a power of annihilation. The mode of my presence in the world is the subject in so far as by reducing itself solely to this certainty of being a subject, it becomes active annihilation.”

14 Etienne Balibar, “What is the Politics of the Right of Man?” in Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on Politics and Philosophy Before and After Marx, trans. James Swenson (New York: Routledge, 1994), 219 – 20. The dialectic of property presupposes “an arbitrary decision: that every object, raw or refined material, every natural or artificial (or even immaterial) “thing” is effectively appropriable (whether by an individual or an institution) in the form of an exclusive disposal. And despite some difficult cases – paradoxical “exceptions” – the principle of total possession of objects has reigned unchallenged, and has appeared as the corollary of the constitution of individuals as free proprietors, of their realization in and by property. Ever since old theological or theologico-political notions such as the “eminent domain” of God or of the sovereign over the entire earth have lost all significance, what has posed problems (and is today undergoing new developments) has above all been the possibility of extending the application of this principle of total possession to the human person itself, particularly when the human body, the use of its services and its capacities enters into commodity cir- culation. But the question was never again posed whether the principle of total possession brings with it intrinsic limits, that is, whether there are not “objects” that, by nature, cannot be appropriated, or more precisely that can be appropriated but not totally possessed.”


16 Benjamin, 24. compare with Sartrre, footnote 12.


18 Benjamin, 24.

19 Daney, “Before and After the Image.”
as our own. Representation of war by the media today, however, erases even the sight of these bodies, fearful of their volatility. With the reign of the Visual, “the other’s eyes have disappeared, by a common and implicit accord.” It is striking to see how Daney echoes Benjamin’s own concern about a world where all communication has atrophied to information, from information to sensation: for Benjamin, modernity is characterized by the eyes that have lost the ability to look, “eyes-without-a-gaze” that stare back at us blankly with the glassiness of a mirror.

For Gilles Deleuze (whose writings on cinema are indebted to Daney), “when the violence is no longer that of the image and its vibrations but that of the represented, we move into blood-red arbitrariness.” Against the “blood-red arbitrariness” of the Visual, Deleuze gives us the red in Jean-Luc Godard’s Weekend (1967), “it’s not blood, it’s red”: the over-saturated intensity of the color, which spills over from frame to frame, dissociates red from the denotation of blood, so that what we see in Weekend is simultaneously both blood and red, representation and its mediation. There is also the example of a camera that lingers too long, which continues to frame the space even after the action; on the other hand, there are those abrupt cuts that assert themselves as cuts. To this we can add the fatigue of the bodies and the fatigue of the camera in Mizoguchi’s Ugetsu – not to mention Mizoguchi’s long shot, long take, which accentuates the relations among the elements within the shot, so much so that the star of the shot seems to be not the individual, but rather his/her relation to another, the dynamic of the structure itself. Indeed, the brilliance of the sequence is how it ends with the female character in the extreme foreground, the soldiers in the extreme background, how the immensity of their last struggle to stand are visualized as parallel. Thus, what we see is not yet another the victimization of a female character, the objectification of her dead body, but rather the temporal and spatial structure of war itself.

All these examples of the Image allow a sly, subtle disturbance to manifest in the visual field, which splits the spectator’s identification with what he/she sees. Alfred Hitchcock once said that the source of his suspense lay in this splitting via a surplus of an audio/visual parallel. Thus, what we see is not yet another the victimization of a female character, the objectification of her dead body, but rather the temporal and spatial structure of war itself.

To clarify what is at stake in the distinction between the Image and the Visual, let’s briefly rehearse the recent critique of this distinction in Jacques Rancière’s “The Future of the Image” (2003). For Rancière, the distinction between the Image and the Visual is problematic in that the Image is appropriated as a promise of presence, a promise that is somehow not subsumed into the tyranny of the signifier, something concrete, manifestly material, which we grasp at with the claws of the shipwrecked sailor amidst waves upon waves of words that come crashing down upon us; in short, the promise of salvation. It is “a promise of flesh,” specifically, “the spirit made flesh.” Critiquing Barthes as an exemplar of this position, Rancière points out how “the image” is a myth, “served to expiate the sin of the former mythologists: this sin of having wished to strip the visible world of its glories, of having transformed its spectacles and pleasures into a grand web of symptoms and a seedy exchange of signs.”

Indeed, for Barthes, in comparison to any other form of representation, the stakes are higher with the image, especially, the photographic image, because of its reality effect, the

23 Alfred Hitchcock quoted in Pascal Bonitzer, “Hitchcockian Suspense” in Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Lacan (But Were Afraid to Ask Hitchcock), ed. Slavoj Zizek (London: Verso, 2002), 22. Bonitzer brilliantly argues that the “dirtiness” of early cinema, “the excremental carnivalesque of the burlesque,” in Hitchcock “was interiorized and moralized, and passed over into the gaze – that is, into the register of desire.” “All Hitchcock has done in his films is to make the best possible use,” Bonitzer says, “of the function of the gaze laid bare by crime.” “crime drives both the natural order of things and the natural order of cinema off course, by introducing a stain which precipitates a gaze an so brings about a fiction. Evil itself is a stain.”
27 Rancière, 10.
way it can smoothly, seamlessly substitute for the world we see – “this stubbornness of the Referent in always being there,” as Barthes says in *Camera Lucida* (1980). When we see a photograph, we are immediately inclined to see what it represents, rather than the fact that it is a photograph. According to Benjamin, the poets of modernity such as Charles Baudelaire were adamantly against the photograph on account of such “stubbornness.” Photography seems to lack the play of absence and presence, the very structure of desire that one finds, for example, in a painting: it sticks too closely to the world. For Baudelaire, photograph does not evoke; it merely denotes. Thus, “to the gaze that will never get its fill of a painting, photography is rather like food for the hungry or drink for the thirsty.” It supplies the compulsion to see and assists in reducing the embodied experience of seeing to an abstract form of accumulating knowledge – a medium particularly pertinent to those “eyes-without-a-gaze.”

Barthes, however, makes a virtue of the photograph and the stubbornness of its referent. When I see a photograph of myself, he says, it is not merely a representation, but it is myself as other – it *is* ‘I,’ the I of a specific time and place, and yet this I does not, cannot coincide with ‘myself,’ myself vacillating between the point from which I see and from which I am seen. To sense the presence of the other, to lose our conscious sense of self: this is the “photographic ecstasy,” the madness of the photograph that society seeks to tame by surrendering ‘myself’ to ‘I,’ the uncertainty of being for the certainty of having, that is, the security of identifying with my own image. Barthes’ claim for the indexicality of the photographic image is not so much a matter of medium-specificity, but rather of subjectivity, specifically subjectivity in the name of extimacy. To reiterate, the politics of extimacy critiques the self-possession of the subject and defines our relation to the other: how we are doubled by a strange yet intimate other, how at the very core of our being is something we cannot name, the sense of something always already so much more than the selves we own. And *Camera Lucida* becomes a plea for the alterity of the image, the image’s affect, what Barthes calls “the punctum”: the ecstasy of the photograph that punctures the visual mastery of the viewer, a pleasure that the one does not seek, but rather “rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me.”

Rancière rebels against what he perceives as a theological turn in the analysis of Image. Furthermore, for Rancière, Barthes’ plea for the punctum is an attempt to preserve the purity of affect by erasing the very genealogy of affect: it erases the history of relations between art, commodity, and discourse. Questioning the recent enthusiasm for affect in theory and practice, we can add to Rancière’s concern the wariness of whether or not the insistence on presence, this ‘materialism,’ is one that has been enforced at the expense of the economic and the socio-political – a repression of the Marxian problematic (note, Marx’s critique of Feuerbach), perhaps a repression that is symptomatic of the bio-political, the brute materiality of biology become the very matter of politics (see, Michel Foucault; Giorgio Agamben.)

Such concerns, however, are not to denounce the turn to affect; on the contrary, I would argue, such concerns are what necessitate this turn. Affect does not subjectivize: it estranges. And the argument for affect, the alterity of the image, its politics of extimacy emphasizes the destabilizing potential of our perception, the ‘danger’ in our desire to see. It specifically criticizes the modern compulsion to simply see, to reduce vision to the increasingly incessant accumulation of information from which the other seems to erupt as some return of the repressed: the obligation to know, to see, fed by the fear of the illogical, irrational other. Extimacy exposes how the outside is inside (or vice versa), how we are doubled by the other, invisible and yet perceptible, strange and yet intimate. Yes, indeed, it *is* a promise of presence – but *not* the presence of a transcendental other, “the spirit made flesh,” who is elevated to the position of exteriority in which he/she contemplates the world unfurled in front of him. Nor is it an immanent other, that is, externalized by another person or thing to which we are tied to in some existential embrace, “the promise of flesh,” as it were. It is the presence of the other who is neither outside nor inside, but extimate, an outside that is inside us, that splits us from ourselves – the other who we sense as a disturbance in our vision, perhaps through the stuttering of a camera, those “unattributable shots”: “gaps and holes, necessary hollows and superfluous plentitude, forever missing images and always defective gazes.”

**4. We’re Missing an Image…**

To conclude, the politics of extimacy pursues a rupture within perception, the potential to disrupt the pervasive field of the visual; a destabilization of the subject with the possibility to counter our alienation and reification. It is a politics which does not seek to destroy from a position of exteriority in which one absents oneself, but to decompose from within: “I agree to accompany such decomposition, to decompose myself as well, in the process: I scrape, catch, drag.” Thus, to reclaim the strange intimacy of the cinema and its potential for sensorial shock, to redeem the radicality of this shock against its increasing banalization. Or to perform a certain iconoclastic cinephilia by puncturing the image, by leaving its space empty: Daney, finally, gives us the example of Godard who, after an interview, asked to have it illustrated with a gap, a hole, captioned “here, the customary photograph.” For Daney, “By leaving the space empty, he showed the possibility of not pasting over.”

28  Barthes, 6.
30  Barthes, 119. compare footnote 9.
31  Barthes, 26.
Conflict, informed by a complexion of personal subjectivities and cultural forces, exists within and between people. Where there is difference there will be conflict and as human difference is inevitable, so is conflict. The question is, what tools are available to engage with conflict towards questioning, examination, reformation and transformation?

Peace is not the absence of conflict. The vision of democracy itself is based on the sharing of difference towards change. Healthy engagement with conflict builds trust, recognition, reciprocity, accountability and responsibility. The Civil Rights Movement and the Women’s Rights Movement are examples of clarification of societal values through conflict and engagement with difference. Healthy conflict is a simultaneous destructive and constructive movement resulting in change.

The fear and suppression of engagement with difference dispirits and leads to negative conflicts where trust is eroded, relationships are destroyed, positions are polarized and ideology becomes rigid. We witness this in our personal lives, in the lives of others close to us and in the lives of those we have never and will never meet. The newspaper is a repository of social conflicts on local and global levels. There is no end to conflict but there can be understanding and recognition of social conditioning and collusion which stultify the dance of conflict into entrenched positions, distorted perspectives and violence.

It has occurred to me, since I formally began the study of Conflict Resolution in 2002, that Aesthetics, and specifically the history and pedagogy of visual art, has an intrinsic and implicit relationship to conflict and as such has much to offer the field of conflict mediation and negotiation.

Aesthetics, the philosophy of questioning the integrity of form, offers brilliant tools for how to see, question, disassemble, reform, reframe, speculate and unknow. Aesthetics thrives on conceptual, formal, structural, perceptual and experiential conflict, needing to undo in order to see anew, displace in order to revise meaning, obscure in order to seduce and rupture in order to reveal the sublime. Aesthetics does not distinguish in value between chaos and order, form and formlessness, meaning and nonsense and as such can easily find its way around and between the disruptions, internal and external, psychological and political, of conflict.

While we live in a culture that puts value on exclusivity, uniqueness, certainty, objectiveness and resolve, artists must function as open and sensorial, sensitive to subtlety, ambiguity and contradiction.

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1 This is an excerpt from a longer essay with the same title.
This co-mingling and uncertainty are equally true and present in every conflict. As fact is driven by the person/subject telling the story, there may be as many "facts" and stories as there are subjects involved in the conflict. Individuals often feel a moral imperative in the truth of their story and will feel that their identity is threatened by another's version. In many ways those involved in conflict blindly mirror each other and miss the richness of their likeness and their difference, preferring to focus on the impossible fractured-ness of their difference and believing that only one complete whole can be right at any one time.

Is conflict, in and of itself, the problem? Can we objectify the existence of conflict apart from personal and social contexts? Are facts the truth? Is each person's identity whole? Is one's subjectivity separate from the world? Are we separate from each other?

To unpack conflict we have to ask questions of subject formation and identity, not what do we know but how do we know it? How is a subjectivity formed and what constitutes an identity?

1.

I was born into psychological and political hysteria in Tel Aviv, Israel, 1951; six years after the violence of the Holocaust, three years after the violent creation of the State of Israel. I was innocent and unaware of the historical and emotional contexts, nevertheless experienced directly the psycho-physical affects on the survivors and their imperative for primal self preservation and self determination.

This radical imperative, in the aftermath of violent conflict, left no room for mourning, emotional processing, evaluation and self critique, rather it blindly laid the foundation for conflict based on guilt, neglect, fear and entitlement. The repercussions were, and are, personal and political, within the self, the family and throughout the social fabric of the region and in fact the world. Today we look towards the Middle East and we witness a politics ignorant of its own psychology, blind to mirroring its resemblance of the other. The result is a perpetuation of violence and conflict, internally and externally.

Art, the integrity of form, speaks vibrationally to this question of blind mirroring.

2.

The first impact of my art schooling, 1971-1977, was an assignment to write a definition of "beauty" on 2 separate sheets of paper, one with a pen, the other typewritten. My first aesthetic lesson taught me that the same definition would look different depending on the context: 2 different apparatus used to convey the same meaning. "Beauty" by pen is not the same "beauty" by typewriter.

Beauty is our sameness when we smile together.

3.

There came a succession of endless Aesthetic Lessons turning my world upside down. Not only requiring me to constantly re-evaluate meaning in relation to context but to recognize emphatically identity as relational. During the 1970's and 1980's, early on in my career as an artist, my explorations centered on questions of the subject and the ineffability of locating one's subjectivity. Who is this "I"; from where do "I" see; how do "I" see; why do "I" see in the way that "I" do? I came to understand the importance of witnessing the simultaneous presence and mutability of "I" as implicit in the process of self-knowledge. It became clear too that this "I" is always contingent on relating to "you". To know oneself one must encounter the other. In presence and mutability, the act of relating is both real and fiction.

"And ever since: hunting, harrying, I track you down, run away. I hunt your soul in every corner of your body. I hunt without weapons, it is a love hunt, I turn clever and powerful doves loose on you. But this is not always possible. Sometimes where you hide is inside me, I have to search myself to drive you out of hiding…Our drama is that we live in a state of mutual invasion. Now you are not only outside me but also within me. I am full of you and empty of you. How can that be possible?"


Cixous brilliantly points to this ineffability of locating "I" and "you", both present and absent. Translating this into the context of mediation, David Augsberger, in his book "Conflict Mediation Across Cultures", uses the term “interpathically” to describe the ability to perceive and experience another’s culture, its content and context, from a place from within oneself while also being present from without. Interpathically, is the phenomenology of knowing through the sensorial dimensions of physical experience, touching, seeing, smelling, hearing and feeling.

4.

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The somatic and cultural body is both a channel and a catalyst for revealing and recognizing this co-mingling of identities: self and other. Aesthetics can be utilized to break down the complexity of "seeing" in order to reveal layers of cultural codes and subjectivity. We often take for granted the experience of seeing, assuming that what we see is self-evident. In actuality, seeing is a very complex act, physiological, psychological, social and emotional. Our deeply held cultural beliefs are evident in how we see, as are our personal experiences and memories often held as emotion in our bodies and projected onto the object or person of our sight. We often believe we are seeing what is before us when in actuality we are seeing our assumptions, reflections of ourselves. The Seeing Triangle unpacks 3 dominant and interdependent aspects of seeing to better recognize our experience of each one. Each of us may have a dominant way of seeing, formally/physically, perceptually or experientially, but in fact all three aspects occur si-
multaneously. If one tends to dominantly see perceptually, through judgment or belief, underneath this "seeing" there is also an experiential element of memory, emotion and sensation. The suppression of the experience will colour how one sees, shifting what is seen. Recognizing "how" we see, informs us of our particular differences. This self-knowledge is an important process, as recognition of our differences helps us to appreciate the difference of others, and opens paths for engagement.

5.

The Body in the Picture is an aesthetic exercise culled from my personal artistic practice and developed to uncover the subtleties of identity as inter-subjective and relational. Participants are asked to bring with them pictures which they have collected both from the public domain and from their personal autobiographies. The only qualifier is that the images be compelling to them, either through attraction or repulsion. I know from my own practice, that a picture is collected because we consciously or unconsciously have an identification with it both psychologically and socially. It represents, often subliminally, an aspect of ourselves. This aspect may exist in the psychic realm of desire, fantasy, memory or dreams and may be socially connected to family, history or culture.

Sitting in a circle, I invite participants to focus on one of their images, scanning how they are viewing through ocular, perceptual and experiential filters and noticing the affects that are generated by them. After 2 minutes I ask participants to pass their image to the person on their left and to focus on this new image. This is repeated until each person has their image back and once more, they are to focus on their image after having their attention intercepted by the images of others. We will then break for personal journaling before opening up a collective discussion of how each person experienced "seeing" themselves and each other. I have utilized this exercise since 1985 and I continue to be fascinated by the richness of what can be uncovered about subjectivity and otherness.

Between 1991-1995 I created a portfolio of photographs as portraits, inviting individuals to bring me their autobiographical and public domain pictures, collected because they were compelled either by repulsion or attraction. I turned their images into 35 mm slides and projected 2 and 3 at a time to superimpose onto a screen floor to ceiling size. The person was then invited to physically move through the space between the projectors and the screen using their body shadows to explore relationships between their chosen images. By blocking projected light they would reveal and conceal parts of the over laying projections. The result was like a lava lamp of fluid inter-narratives. I would watch through my camera, placed behind the projectors, and would call "freeze" on seeing a compelling relationship between their physical body, their shadow and the mutated images. The position was held and I would take a picture.

In the image above, the subject, Kelly Hemenway, stands in black silhouette with her head thrown back. She instinctively took this position when she recognized herself as the hair-shaven teen, now with cartoon bullets whizzing across her head. She was quite surprised at the inherent violence within this relationship. Each of these portraits represents invisible seams between who we think we are, who we've been and who we would like to be, rendering identity as mutable and uncanny. What is revealed is full of internal struggle and conflict. The subject is challenged into a personal recognition she was unaware of.
I ask:

How can we think perceptually, experientially, formally and ethically to critically understand both cultural and psycho-physical-spiritual aspects of subjectivity?

How does the social and the political name, shame and blame our experience of the world, and how do we collude to internalize those conditions and reproduce them?

The woman, Malka Michelson (see opposite page), faces the screen and sees within her shadow herself as a child in 1962. In the overlap of images the child is now embedded amongst prisoners of war in the famous photograph by Margaret Burke White, *The Living Dead of Buchenwald*, 1945. Malka later told me that this war left a deep pathos of grief within her family of origin.

This man, Robert Radloff (see opposite page), stretches his arms out towards himself as a young child. Within the shadow of his silhouette and cutting through the child he reveals the face of Jesse Norman, the famous American opera singer. The synthesis of a black woman embedded within the image of a white corporate man is uncanny and disturbs our cliché cultural mores of racial identity stereotypes.

6.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interiority</th>
<th>Cultural</th>
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<td>Myth</td>
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<td>Family</td>
<td>Age</td>
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<td>Desire</td>
<td>Physical/Mental Ability</td>
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The cultural qualities on the right are what typically signify identity. One may be able to “see” these qualities and therefore assume knowing something of the other. The qualities named on the left are not visible on the surface but potently drive identity from inside. Who then is before us? Can we assume we know who we are looking at? How do the more numinous aspects of subjectivity move with, wrap around, slip between the social poles?

We all too often get fixed in our opinions and judgments about the other based on simplistic identity codes which obscure the humanity and difference of the person. Ironically, when we fall into these traps we obscure our humanity and our difference as well.

Difference requires an agreement of mutual recognition and recognition requires a commitment to engage intimately with difference. When we refuse engagement we subordinate not only the other but also ourselves. When we annihilate the other we annihilate our otherness. When we exclude the other we run away from that which we do not know of ourselves. We divide and isolate.

*In the mirror image, the mirage, we see only the surface details, and it is as if each detail holds the key to who we really are.*


Similarly, when we refuse our own visibility, that is, when we refuse to engage with our subtle selves, we cannot know our own otherness. How then can we engage intimately with
someone else? Ralph Ellison, the brilliant author of Invisible Man, 1947, an epic journey of a Black American man towards self recognition in a racist society, eloquently writes in the prologue,

I am one of the most irresponsible beings that ever lived. Irresponsibility is part of my invisibility: any way you face it, it is a denial. But to whom can I be responsible and why should I be, when you refuse to see me? And wait until I reveal how truly irresponsible I am. Responsibility rests on recognition, and recognition is a form of agreement...

and in the epilogue, at the end of his journey, the protagonist says,

I'm shaking off the old skin and I'll leave it here in the hole. I'm coming out, no less invisible without it, but coming out nevertheless. And I suppose it's damn well time. Even hibernations can be overdone, come to think of it. Perhaps that's my greatest social crime, I've overstayed my hibernation, since there's a possibility that even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play.

In Summer 2001, I read an article in the New York Times about Dr. Irma Rodriguez, a forensic scientist working on the many unsolved kidnappings and murders of young women in the desert around Juarez, Mexico. Dr. Rodriguez had finessed a way of re-creating sculptural likenesses of these murder victims whose identities had been erased. I was deeply moved and compelled by her abilities to transform human absence into presence.

In Spring 2002, more than a year into the current Intifada between Palestinians and Jewish Israelis, a cover of Newsweek Magazine depicted the double portrait of a young Palestinian woman, the first female Palestinian suicide bomber, and one of the Jewish Israelis killed with her in the blast, a young woman who looked very much like the bomber.

Each woman holds the gaze of the viewer but neither will look at the other. How do these two seemingly disparate cultural violences, Mexican and Middle Eastern, seem strangely the same while different, worlds apart geographically as well as in their respective confounding and incomprehensible politics, become conflated and reconstituted in the mind and heart of a reader?

In November 2003, I sought and found Dr. Irma Rodriguez and invited her to found a Masters of Dispute Resolution in 2005, learning strategies of mediation, negotiation and reconciliation. This knowledge informs and extends my current artwork to explore intimacy and social engagement. Mediation has thrown me head first into the public psyche; a social lab of the real and the immediate where form meets content and ideology shifts back to experience. Here too I maintain an emphasis on the reciprocity between looking “out” at culture and looking “in” within oneself.

I find that my very formation implicates the other in me, that my own foreignness to myself is paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection to others. In this sense, I cannot know myself perfectly or know my “difference” from others in an irreducible way.

Judith Butler, Precarious Life, 2004

To extend my inquiry further into the social domain, I created a series of photographic portraits of these sculpted heads focusing on the specific gaze each woman holds towards the other.
I am very aware of how social conflict has become chronically internalized within individuals and is blindly perpetuated by people in all types of social and political relationships. To bring together the best of my professional practices as artist, mediator and educator I am developing “Foreign Exchanges” to provide mediation services for conflict resolution, as well as coaching, consulting and training to assist individuals and groups in building engagement across personal and cultural differences.

Foreign Exchanges borrows perceptual skills from aesthetics, sensorial skills from the somatic arts and communication and negotiation skills from mediation to build self-knowledge, critical thinking, recognition of difference, empathy, and aspiration. It looks at the systemic social and personal conditions beneath each conflict to re-view and unwind the knots of identity. Our abilities to recognize personal and cultural differences allows for the creation of new relationships of generosity and reciprocity.

There is a sameness in being human, but humanity hinges on the subtlety of our differences. How is foreignness to ourselves and to each other shaped by simultaneous political and psychological forces? There are endless subtleties implicit in identity. Who are we to ourselves and to each other? The notion of foreignness is highly charged in contemporary society, from the stranger next door, to the undocumented worker, to the party with whom we are in conflict, to the unidentified terrorist. Who is the foreigner? How are we each foreign?
"These three pattern poems are based on phone calls with officials from the dementia ward at my father’s nursing home as they try to “redirect” his intimate intentions toward another patient. (As a result of these intentions and actions, the nursing home has struggled to construct policy regarding intimate/sexual relations between persons with symptoms related to Alzheimer’s disease.)"

– Steven Aebury
Everybody Who Teaches Writing in Prison Has a Book

Dorothy Albertini

Walking to class through a few gates are two women called Dot and Dorothy, wearing beepers and invisible ink and a student of Dot’s is mopping floor. Dot’s name is also Dorothy. Her student says, Hello. Dorothy number one turns—yes, sharply. Did he just call you “Darling?” She mistook from “Darathy” but it does not reassure her. He should have used the second name. And nothing must sound like darling.

In prison, they don’t say “woman,” they say “female.” A female walked in the room. There was this female and she was talking all about it. Dorothy reads stories and essays and poems with them. She is thinking of voice and style and word choice. They say, The female in the story is pretty paranoid. Officers are female officers. She is a teacher; a female. An officer comes to help unlock a door and Dorothy thanks her. Louis shakes his head. Don’t thank her, that’s her job.

The texts are sometimes ironic. She sees Louis she doesn’t know what to say to him. He doesn’t know what to say to her either. He pats her shoulder. This does not trouble him. She asks him how his semester goes. He looks deeper into her eyes, he thinks she can do better. Says Fine, fine. We’re all adjusting. Taking some time to find our footing. The end of the sentence goes down but his eyes go up, wider. Is she done?

One day he wants to learn Shakespeare. He chooses the sonnet about the ugly beloved and the lover who knows how ugly. He reads pure praise and passion from it, and for a half an hour becomes a man all love. Dorothy makes some observations. This is a very ugly woman—her lips are not red, her gait is not light. She does not smell good. She does not look good. Does he understand? He thinks about this. He cannot pronounce “coral” and she cannot get him to.

Dorothy reads aloud a story of an alcoholic lover. The alcoholic is a woman, the object of her love is also female.

It may be the wrong thing to read. Alcoholism has always angered her. A person is struggling. Dan putting his hands on light bulbs and sleeping under bushes. Dorothy driving him home. Him, chanting. Don’t look at me like that, until he passes out. She wonders will she have to wake him when they get there. She parks to open his door and he tumbles out, comes puking into the world again, alcohol and alcohol and something orange. In this story the women are not yelling yet. One is asleep and one is counting bottle caps.

They talk about this story politely. Clarifications first. Louis has such things to say.

That was a Woman, right? And a woman?

And the next man, Cause I didn’t realize at first that was a woman.

So they are lesbians?

Louis, approaching thirty, muses instead about age. He wonders is the teacher Dorothy old enough to drink this stuff?

There is a big cake that has been made for students and teachers. Many people have made speeches and everyone has clapped. There are photographs as well. Louis appears in sunglasses, saying, Come on. A Dorothy must be photographed with cake. She supposes she must, pictures are memories and this is not to be forgot, so she follows Louis to the camera. He hands her the knife says she has to cut she’s the woman. The photographer is a man, Louis is man, a man is to her left, a man to her rear and only one other Dot.

Here is a wide cake. She hands the knife to the other Dot. A photograph is taken. Louis with sunglasses shakes her hand. It is like an athlete who doesn’t know what he plays but thinks he does. Not enough of his hand. They shake, she frowns.

This is not the way you shake hands. He smiles: Because you are a woman. That’s how with a woman. His mother taught him this.
Salim Shawamreh: The Kafkaesque
Chana Morgenstern
Photographs by: Andrea Brooks

Salim Shawamreh is a 45 year old Palestinian resident of the village of Anata in East Jerusalem. His interview was conducted in English.

I bought this piece of land here in Anata, which is very near to my family’s refugee camp. And from 1990 until 1994 I tried to get a building permit to build a house on this piece of land. First time they told me we can’t give you the building permit because your land is outside the zoning of the village. Zoning is like a ring they put around the Palestinian villages. If you get out of this ring it means you are outside the zoning. If you get out of this ring it means that you enter to Area C, it means that you are under the full Israeli control. You have to get the permit from the Israeli authorities. I apply to get the permit from the Israeli authorities, then they told me your land is outside the zone. They told me your land is an agricultural area, apply for it as an agricultural area.

So I apply for the second time. I wait another one and a half year. Then they told me we can’t give you the building permit because your land has a big slope. There is slope in-the, in-the, in the land. Well if you look to the settlements, Israeli settlements, it has been built at the top of the mountain. There are no slopes there! Are we living in the twentieth century? Can—I can’t rent a bulldozer and make the land flat? And this is Kafkaesque. This is the Kafkaesque! Giving you a reason that what—what do you do? And I-I want to be legal, but I can’t. When he’s telling you that there is big slope in the land, what do you do? Then, really, I went to the civil administration officer and I told him I know that I will never get the building permit. I will build a home and God will help me after that. He told me, no, apply for the third time and for sure you will get the thing. And every time you are applying to get the building permit, it costs you more than five thousand American dollars. Just to apply and bring you know, surveying and the maps and all these things.

So I apply for the third time, and I wait another one and a half year. Then they told me we can’t give you the building permit because you missed two signatures of the ownership of the land. Now every time you are applying you are getting a new reason not to give you the building permit. It’s the same land, it’s, it’s the same eh, guy. Then, in 1994, when they told me that you missed two signatures of the ownership of the land, I get sure that I will never get any building permits. Because if you went to Anata now, there is more than 3,000 houses built, and ask for a building permit, you will not find five building permits from this 3,000 units which was built. In all of Anata you will not find five, eh building permits.

So I decide, I’m going to build the house anyway. And I start building it. I finish building it in 1994 and live inside with my family, my six kids and my wife Arabia, until four years of living inside the home, while we are sitting here eating, eating our lunch, I hear a big voice outside the home. I get out to see, I saw my home surrounded by soldiers, eh, all the nearby area, all the area surrounded, surrounded by soldiers. Then the head of the soldiers, the officer, at the door, here, ask me if this is my home. I told him yes it’s my home. Said to me, it’s not your home now. You have fifteen minutes to take your belongings and family out because we want to demolish this home. I told him, what are you saying? At the entrance there I push him outside, he’s surrounded by soldiers. They start kicking me on my back, on my head by their weapons. Arabia, she closed the door and start calling people. And they are kicking me around and they arrest me and they put me in the corner. Then they start kicking on the door. Arabia close the door. They start breaking the windows around, throwing inside tear gas to force my six kids and my wife out of the house. Arabia that day she lost her consciousness. There are pictures showing the demolitions. She lost her consciousness and they took her to hospital. And my kids screaming and crying, pulled by the Israeli soldiers outside the home. My daughters they took them from their hair. And imagine yourself, arresting, freezing to the ground, arrested. Can’t do anything. And imagine when they start taking your furniture. Your special things inside your bedroom. And throw it, outside to the street. I’m trying to have a home, like you. And like anybody in the world. But I can’t do it. And imagine your, your-your underwear on the ground. Your underwear for your-your wife, thrown to the street. My daughters scream and cry, pulled by the Israeli soldiers outside the home. My daughters they took them from their hair. And imagine yourself, arresting, freezing to the ground, arrested. Can’t do anything. And imagine when they start taking your furniture. Your special things inside your bedroom. And throw it, outside to the street. I’m trying to have a home, like you. And like anybody in the world. But I can’t do it. And imagine your, your-your underwear on the ground. Your underwear for your-your wife, thrown to the street. Then the bulldozers start demolishing the home. Cutting more than fifty two trees I planted around the home. Concrete fence around the home, they-they demolish it. They left us with nothing that day.

And it’s not only Salim Shawamre family who has fallen this experience. It’s more than thirteen thousand Palestinians’ homes has been demolished since 1967 until now. Jeff Halpern and the Israeli Committee Against Home Demolition came to us, and all of us suggested that we have to rebuild the home again as a resistance to occupation. And really we started. Hundreds of volunteers came to us. Helping us rebuilding the home. And we...
finish the home as a shell building in 2nd of August 1998. It took us about twenty days to
make the shell of the building. 3rd of August 1998 at four o'clock in the morning we open
our eyes in the tent to see machine guns pointing to our faces not to move. They surround
the area again by hundreds of soldiers. And the bulldozer came again and demolish the
home for the second time, over the scaffolding, over the sheeting, because it's fresh concrete
you know, supporting. They demolish the home for the second time, and this time what's
left from the trees, they cut it. Even the tent, which given to us by the Red Cross, they took
it. They left us under the sun without anything. There were two Christian peace maker
team members, they slept over with us that night because of the danger. Jeff Halpern, the
head of the Israeli Committee Against Home Demolition slept with us also because of the
danger that night. And they get arrested, the three of them. One of the Christian peace
maker team members he tried to chain himself by the column of the house.

That's why we start building the home for the third time. And while we are making plas-
tering and tiling inside the home they come and they demolish it again. And that day the
civil administration officer tell me a word which I will never forget. He told me, as soon
as these Israelis are coming to help you, you will never get any building permits. It means
that from his sight he don't want to see Israelis and Palestinians together. Because he is from
the Right. I know him. He is from the Right. He don't want to see Palestinians and Israelis
working together and eating together and smiling, or-or you know, talking together. He-
he don't want to see that. And he told me in my face: as soon as these Israelis are coming
to help you, you will never get any home in your life. And he demolish the home and he
went away. Then I sit with Israeli Committee Against Home Demolition and all of us
suggested that we have to rebuild the home again now, not as a home this time, but as a
peace center. For all the international community. For the Israeli peace movement people.
For the Palestinians. To strategize together from this place how to help others getting out
of the situation they are in. And really we start rebuilding the home more than thirty
volunteers came from the international community, hundreds of volunteers Israelis came
to help in this, Palestinian volunteers came to help. And we start rebuilding it as a peace
center, and we call it Beyt Arabia, you know Arabia is my wife's name. And we call it Beyt
Arabia: Arabia's house.

You know, before I start rebuilding for the third time, you know, all the media came and
focus on the problem. All the Israeli newspapers. Israeli television. CNN. BBC. All the
media came and focus on the development of what happened to this government running
after-after a guy who's trying to get a home, a small home for himself and for his family.
Because of that the civil administration officer wrote a letter in Ha'aretz Newspaper, that
we demolish his home because he miss two signatures of the ownership of the land. He
say that if he brought me those two missing signatures I'll give him the building permit.
Israeli Committee Against Home Demolition sent the lawyer to the Civil Administration
Office to see which two signatures they want, which two names they want so we can bring
it to them. And three months, that lawyer, trying to eh, to get the names. Nobody give
him anything. Then what I did: Anata is a small village, and everyone owns land in Anata.
I get more than four hundred signatures. Then I went to the Civil Administration Office
and I put it on the officer's table. I told him, here is all Anata on your table, pick the two
signatures you missed. You don't believe what he said. We lost your file. We don't know
the names.

Then we start rebuilding the home for the fourth time. And while we are making plaster-
ing and tiling inside the home they come and they demolish it again. And that day the
civil administration officer tell me a word which I will never forget. He told me, as soon
as these Israelis are coming to help you, you will never get any building permits. It means
that from his sight he don't want to see Israelis and Palestinians together. Because he is from
the Right. I know him. He is from the Right. He don't want to see Palestinians and Israelis
working together and eating together and smiling, or-or you know, talking together. He-
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to help you, you will never get any home in your life. And he demolish the home and he
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Arabia: Arabia's house.
NOTES ON IMAGES:

Intimate Reason
Avi Alpert

Reason would seem to be opposed to intimacy. Reason, as we have come to understand it, is a removal from the world, the abstract thinking that differentiates us from billiard balls. Whereas we can abstract ourselves from the moment and reflect on possibilities for action, the balls are helplessly in motion.

This is the idea of reason that we find, for example, in Rousseau’s *On the Social Contract*, where he thinks of the natives of the Americas as billiard balls. He argues that the shift from the state of nature to civilized man is precisely the moment when he, “substitutes justice for instinct…[and] man, who had hitherto taken only himself into account, finds himself forced to act upon other principles and consult his reason before listening to his inclinations.”

But two questions arise here. First, what is unclear from Rousseau’s analysis is the means by which this occurs. How is it that humans, all humans, differentiate themselves from billiard balls in their capacity to reflect? Second, is such removal and reflection even desirable? After all, Rousseau himself had previously heaped praise on the natives in *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*. It was the “savages,” he maintained in that essay, who had it right. It was only because we were so far removed from their state and had no choice but to go on that he claimed a value to reason, to abstract thinking.

Later thinkers, and Heidegger most famously among them, would challenge Rousseau’s descent into reason. Heidegger would argue that what is of use is not “reason,” but “recollection.” By this he meant the ability to remember a certain primordial relation to the earth despite no longer being a “savage.” The movement away from the pre-Socratic gods, the embrace of Platonic forms and the rise of monotheism, constituted the great downfall in Heidegger’s eyes, and the return to a pagan spirit was all that could save a society doomed by its own instrumental reason.

In line with this thinking, Heidegger would become one of the most important advocates of intimacy over reason. He suggested a need to be intimate with both Earth and the gods. He had, however, a very particular take on what intimacy between people meant. For Heidegger, being intimate did not mean the collapse of persons, the subsuming of one being into another. Rather, it implied the opposite. Intimacy was self-containment, a ripping away from the beloved in order to preserve one’s own authenticity. One was not intimate in a space of togetherness, but rather one was intimate with oneself. Intimacy is the condition of possibility for thinking.

Two authentic individuals belonging together of course need a space of their own. This is what Heidegger spoke of in the essay, “Building, Dwelling, Thinking.” Here he suggested that the building of a space had to take into account the elements of the “fourfold”: sky, earth, divinities and mortals. He wrote poetically, lavishly, about his hut in the Black Forest and how the intimate space it created allowed for dwelling, and allowed for thinking. “To dwell, to be set at peace, means to remain at peace within the free sphere that safeguards each thing in its nature.” Thus, for Heidegger, thinking is this intimacy of considering each thing in its nature: “it belongs to the nature of our thinking of that bridge that in itself thinking gets through, persists through, the distance to that location.” One builds a space among the elements, one dwells, one thinks without representation, without abstraction, without reason, and rather, within the intimacy of recollecting the world itself.

Long before Heidegger had written this essay, a young Lithuanian student, distinctively out of place in his surroundings, came to study in Freiburg with the great Edmund Husserl. What he found there instead was the rising star of Heidegger. This student, Emmanuel Levinas, would eventually become one of the greatest of contemporary French thinkers, and one of the strongest critics of Heidegger.

Levinas had originally been quite taken by the young philosopher. As early as 1932, he published the essay, “Martin Heidegger and Ontology,” which was among the first essays written on Heidegger in any language. The following year, however, Levinas abandoned this project, since Heidegger had officially joined the Nazi party. Levinas lost hope in the fabled thinker. As he would come to put it, “One can forgive many Germans, but there are some Germans it is difficult to forgive. It is difficult to forgive Heidegger.”

Levinas was distrustful of many things in Heidegger, especially his disavowal of reason and his interest in pre-Socratic paganism. For Levinas, the triumph of monotheism and the promise of reason were the very things that could stop violence. Heidegger’s alignment with Nazism was readable line by line in his philosophy, right down to his thoughts on intimacy and dwelling.

In a section entitled “Dwelling,” in his first major work, *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas sought to restore intimacy to the realm of reason. Rousseau was wrong in separating reason from intimacy; Heidegger was wrong in separating intimacy from reason. Levinas thus begins by re-appropriating the Heideggerian term, “recollection,” and restoring it to a definition aligned with reason: “Recollection, in the current sense of the term, designates a suspension of the immediate actions the world solicits in view of a greater attention to oneself, one’s possibilities and the situation.”

Levinas, nevertheless, takes Heidegger very seriously. He was not interested in returning to something pre-Heideggerian, nor in disavowing the power of Heidegger’s insights. As such, he does not suggest a return to Rousseauist reason, cold and removed from the world, any more than he will defend Heideggerian intimacy. Rather, he will ingeniously bridge the two: “Would the distance with regard to enjoyment [instinctual pleasure], rather than signifying the cold void of the interstices of being [Enlightenment Reason], be lived positively as a dimension of interiority beginning with the intimate familiarity into which life is immersed?” In other words, can’t reason begin with intimacy?

Levinas will then insist on recollection as a form of reason, but also reason as something immediate and lived in the world. He thus adds, “The intimacy which familiarity already presupposes is an intimacy with someone… Recollection refers to a welcome.” Reason occurs in the intimacy of being with another; intimacy is the condition of possibility for thinking. The other separates me from the world at the very moment that she makes me intimate with her. I am able to reflect on the world because I am, at once, pulled out of it by the other who pulls me in to herself.
“This she in Levinas is important and controversial: “The other whose presence…with which is accomplished the primary hospitable welcome which describes the field of intimacy is the Woman. The woman is the condition for recollection, the interiority of the Home, and inhabitation.” The obvious point to make, which Luce Irigaray has re-iterated about Levinas, is that while he preserves a notion of sexual difference, he refuses any reason or agency on the part of the woman. She makes the man a being of intimate reason; she has nothing for herself.

Building on Levinas at the same time she critiques him, Irigaray writes surely one of the most remarkably explicit passages on sex in the history of philosophy:

[There is] the loss of boundaries which takes place for both lovers when they cross the boundary of the skin into the mucous membranes of the body, leaving the circle which encloses my solitude to meet in shared space, a shared breath, abandoning the relatively dry and precise outlines of each body’s solid exterior to enter a fluid universe where the perception of being two persons (de la dualité) becomes indistinct, and above all, acceding to another energy, neither that of the one nor that of the other, but an energy produced together as a result of the irreducible difference of sex.

“Energy,” here, is Irigaray’s word for recollection (it is a Levinasian term – the energy needed for separation). But, in any case, what matters here is that Irigaray adds another element to the discussion in this blustering passage: Intimate reason is not just in the dwelling, it is sexual, and it is produced through sexual difference.

Here Irigaray’s own work becomes problematic, as she follows up the above by writing, “Pleasure between the same sex does not result in that immediate ecstasy between the other and myself.” Only heterosexual sex, in other words, brings one into intimate reason. So Irigaray only redeems woman’s place in the realm of intimate reason by discarding all who are not heterosexual, just as Rousseau discarded all who were not European, Heidegger all who were not of the pagan spirit (i.e., pre-Socratic, mind you, and so certainly also European, and certainly not Jewish), Levinas all who were not masculine.

What is remarkable about all these exclusions is how unnecessary they are. They absolutize reason or intimacy as a singular manifestation of thinking, a unique way in which thought can proceed. They advance exciting and important propositions, but they are hubristic all the way down. Why can there not be intimate reason for all, understood as that moment of engaging with other people (either in separation or immersion) which allows for a movement away from a solipsistic and limited engagement with the world? That is the real insight here: that reason, reflection, abstract thinking, occur in the interstices of interaction and solitude, of welcoming and withdrawing, of reflecting, dwelling, and intimacy. The exclusions of the philosophers here are only so much metaphysical non-sense.
Sudha Premnath (SP): It just happened that this KFI land was located on the fringes of the Reserve Forests in Kaigal. You walk a little deeper and you’re in Kaudiniya Wildlife Sanctuary. Therefore it gave me a wonderful opportunity as a teacher from a city school1 to take students there to expose them to what a forest is and what kind of diversity exists in a forest, and how to study and learn about the lives of people who live in these forests. Otherwise, we can just live in this bubble, this imaginary world that all is well and India has a booming economy and is developing so fast – that there’s so much food. You just walk into a mall and buy anything from anywhere in the world, but you just need to step out to really see how people live. We would go into the villages, sit in the houses and talk to people; go into small government schools and see what the conditions are. We would see what people eat and the various kinds of myths that we have that people are malnourished because there is no food. That’s not true, because we have seen that there is plenty of food produced, but it is all sent to the city and therefore they are malnourished.

As students were already working in Kaigal, it gave us the scope to take up a study of biodiversity through documentation and conservation. You cannot do this without involving the local communities because they are the people living there. If one knows a little bit about environment conservation, you will know that India has tried to adopt strategies of forest conservation from the West and have failed. The reason being that in India there are still a lot of people living around forests who collect resources from these forests. This doesn’t really exist in the West. So, in the West you can adopt strategies of setting aside forest areas where people do not interfere, which you cannot do in India. It doesn’t work. If you want to conserve forests, people should be involved and by people I mean the tribal communities who are the collectors. This is also important because they have tremendous knowledge which in itself is a resource. You need to preserve this knowledge and relate it to conservation and that’s how we started working with the communities.

Of course, when I started the Biodiversity Conservation Program I had only thought about all this theoretically. The idea of a Seed Bank, talking to tribal communities and documenting their knowledge and studying the forest... all this was theoretical, and I’d never done it before. But once we started working we involved people from local villages and slowly learned in the process. The same goes for the livelihood program. We talked to the people and wondered what it was that we could develop as a livelihood. You have to see what is appropriate for them. You cannot try to teach a skill that is too difficult or bring in an organizational structure that is too complicated. It should also be useful in their own lives. We found that they were honey collectors and processing honey is not too difficult. In this way we came up with a few programs.

It was through this process that the community got close to us and themselves expressed the need for schools. Since we felt schools were important and now they too felt the need for it we decided to start the schools. Of course, we didn’t have much money to start schools, we didn’t know of any teachers or even their local language - Telugu2. We didn’t know how to go about doing this but it felt right at that point in time and we plunged in.

Could you say a little more about how the Sanctuary Schools began and the challenges that presented themselves in trying to implement an education program in these communities.

SP: In the tribal villages around Kaigal we see children who are not given the kind of education that we feel is important. We, as people who have gone through a modern system of education, feel that these people should also be given this kind of education and should have better livelihoods and earn a better income. These are our concerns and we are not so sure whether it is a worry for the people themselves.

It is not that the communities there don’t want it. They do want their children to go to school and study and so on but they have no clear understanding of what all of this means. It is not just an issue of the government giving them a school and their children going and coming, but it involves so much responsibility from the family and the community. If they don’t take up the responsibility then education won’t take place. The people don’t realize all that because they themselves have never been to a school. All they see is that if I go to a school and study then I can have a better livelihood and a better income. So they don’t see all this hardship that is involved in the process of education, or the hardships involved through education to pursue a livelihood and sustain it.

There are various kinds of systems and skills that have become important to function in today’s world, and many of these rural communities are totally removed from the way we look at things and function. If you look at a city and organizations run by so-called educated people, we have certain kinds of organizational skills and ways of thinking and so on around which we function. But they function entirely differently. Therefore to start an educational program – at least what we see as education – we want them to understand that it involves a certain rigor and requires sustained effort. For them to understand that and then to take the responsibility and follow through might take a very long time, at least one generation.

One requirement for running schools is the need for individuals with the knowledge and skills, another is the monetary cost. To be able to find teachers with these skills in remote areas and pay them a salary is difficult. Even local people who can be selected as teachers are lacking in most of these skills. So the potential is there, but how long it will take for them to handle it on their own one doesn’t know.

Local Specific

You had mentioned that complicated organizational structures cannot work for projects like this, that something small has to be implemented. Could you talk about this further and also discuss the present structure of KEEP.

SP: Having read Schumacher3 and Gandhi, and the importance they place on being local specific, one has to understand the needs of a community and the skills of the people and work from there. This is also what Krishnamurti4 schools do: when you talk about education you can only start from where an individual is, you cannot start from a predeter-

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1 The Valley School was founded by the Krishnamurti Foundation, India (KFI). KEEP is run in an area owned by KFI and overseen by The Valley School.
2 Telugu is the official language spoken in Andhra Pradesh.
3 E. F. Schumacher is an economist and the author of "Small is Beautiful"; Blond & Briggs Ltd, UK; 1973
4 Jiddu Krishnamurti was a philosopher who founded schools in many parts of the world. During a lecture in 1953 he said:

“If you dominate a child, compel him to fit into a pattern, however idealistic, will he be free at the end of it? If we want to bring about a true revolution in education, there must obviously be freedom at the very beginning, which means that both the parent and the teacher must be concerned with freedom and not with how to help the child to become this or that.”
mined state. So we first tried to find out what they could comprehend, and what it is that they already know and in what little way we can help them to earn a better livelihood with the skills they already have. Every individual has certain capacities and skills and you must start from there, only then people feel accepted as they are and are able to move from there. Otherwise people withdraw and nothing can happen.

So to answer your question, a complex structure is one that is imposed from outside, one that has not evolved within a community and is not appropriate to it and is therefore difficult for them to understand and function within. My brain works in a certain way because of the circumstances in which I've grown up.

Chandra and Krishnamurthy6 come from a nearby farming village but don't know anything about the forest diversity. However, Subbanna or Subbaraiappa who come from a tribal village know a lot about forest diversity. So we have to take Chandra and Krishnamurthy from where they are and then slowly teach them. Then we slowly built a relationship with Subbanna and so on so that they are able to trust us and allow us into their community. This takes a long time, but unless you do all this you cannot even understand at what level each person is. On the other hand, if I go there with my predetermined ideas and my structures of how things should work, it is too complex for them and I cannot impose it on them.

**Outside / In**

So there's the two of you, who are coming from the city with a certain vision and a certain experience as educators with a certain philosophy and so on, and you're moving into these tribal communities where there is no organized educational system in place. Then you've selected a few individuals like Chandra, Mani and Krishnamurthy who in some ways are a link or filter through which you can access the tribal community, because the distance between your vision and the tribal communities may be quite vast. It seems like it is important for this to be filtered through a group of people who are local but still maybe more “agrarian” and in that sense somewhat closer to urban sensibilities and then there are the teachers. Does this also work as a feedback mechanism which helps you see what works and what doesn't?

**SP:** Absolutely. I don't know about a “vision”.... but when we started this – plunged into it, I would say – Krishnamurthy and Chandra became very important because they lived close by, knew the language, had some basic education and could read and write, and so we can communicate with them. When Krishnamurthy first began working for us we didn't even know how it was going to work. But people in the community said he's a good boy and he can work for you. We gave him a set of things to do and he did everything so meticulously and so well and we realized, yes, he is a good person. In the same way Chandra joined us.

We started working with them and they started communicating with the tribal communities. We found that this was a good way of working, instead of us going to the tribal villages all the time, which we did in the beginning. We would go talk to the people in these communities and get to know them, but still Krishnamurthy's or Chandra's interaction was more frequent, more continuous and more close, because they belong to the same land, they see each other as they're driving down and there's a different kind of acceptance, whereas we are still seen as outsiders.

Apart from this, we also wanted it to be central that we employ local people to be employed in their own environment either for conservation, livelihood, education or health. Because they are working locally they have a different kind of feeling for these programs, it's as if the forest belongs to them; if it's education, then they're educating their own people and they feel more committed, more responsible, more attached and closer to the whole thing. These are things we learned as the program evolved, so one important thing is that we didn't start with a fixed idea of what was to be done.

Krishnamurthy and Chandra literally worked with the tribal communities on one end and with scientists, taxonomists and ecologists on the other end. So if we were going into the field to identify plants and so on, they learned how to identify plants, or work with wildlife biologists or visit ecologists at the Indian Institute of Science and take notes. They had these opportunities but we never imagined how they would grow and how much they would learn. Suddenly they were learning a lot of things and they enjoyed it.

**CP:** And this gave them the confidence, when they had the opportunity to talk to visitors, to explain what they had been doing. They would talk about the botanical names and the local names of plants and show them their records. Then, in their interaction with students who they always felt had been given a better opportunity for learning at a school like Valley, they could give them information that they did not have.

**SP:** That's right, that they can teach the students from the city schools; that they can teach teachers from the Valley School and teachers from other city schools things that they do not know.

They have grown and their community respects them. A government official comes or a professor from Kuppam comes and they explain the projects and they say, “oh, very good...
work,” and there is a feeling that I know something and that is what has kept them going and kept them feeling that this will take them somewhere, that their future is not bleak.

In this process we have quite unconsciously become very close. Their trust in me and my trust in them: you know, they run the whole center, they withdraw money when they need it...

CP: That’s a good point, we don’t question them; we don’t question them in a way which signals distrust. We accept whatever they say, we only direct them to present it in a certain order and plan whatever work they are doing. Which instills a confidence and brings them closer. If this person accepts what I’m doing then what I’m doing must be right.

Trust and Conflict Resolution

SP: And if we have a problem we very directly approach it, we just go, sit down and talk like this. If I have something to share with K, Ill just call him, or sometimes Ill call them to Bangalore and we’ll discuss it at home. Prem, I and Krishnamurthy will sit down and say, I heard something like this happened, would you like to share something; is everything alright; did something go wrong; We directly approach it. If there was something wrong, he will say, yes, I shouldn’t have done that, or, yes, this is what happened. Ok, fine, these things happen, but we should know, because unless we share with each other the work cannot continue. That kind of trust. There are a lot of issues like this. Interpersonal problems, relationship problems, are all there amongst them. There might be some kind of discord and then we sit down with all three of them together and talk it over. Each one will bring up their difficulty and we’ll allow the other to talk. We just listen and allow for a conversation and if it doesn’t get sorted out in a day we talk it over for several days.

CP: We may not come to any conclusion, no decision is made.

SP: It comes out in the open and it gets resolved. They also see that we are not making a big issue out of it. Yes, we all face interpersonal problems. It’s not something unique, something we need to split hairs over as if the world has come to an end. Everybody has relationship problems, so do you, and if you don’t then there’s probably something fishy and you’re trying to hide something. Right?

If there are problems with teachers, even that is resolved in the same way. Im sure there are times when we have hurt them and all of that, but as far as possible we’ll make sure that the teachers dignity is not affected. We call them separately, talk to them, and then address it in a group. There was a problem in the community with a teacher and we had to address it. First we talked to the teacher, then to the whole group. In the group we didn’t take the specific teacher’s name, but spoke generally. Then we actually went to that village and brought the villagers together and spoke to the community to tell them that they have equal responsibility and that they cannot blame one person. As parents unless you support the teachers how can they work. Then the community came together and things got sorted out. But the most important thing is addressing it. Communication should be kept open.

People should understand that they can talk honestly and that takes a long time. people are scared of admitting that they have made a mistake, afraid that they will lose their job or the person’s trust. To be able to keep that communication open is very difficult.

But do you feel that this kind of approach works because it’s a smaller organization? That because there’s just a few people you can sit down and talk about it? Do you feel that this kind of education, where you try to integrate all aspects of a community’s life would get lost if the organization exceeded a certain size?

SP: Sure, it will. In fact, direct contact is very essential. Otherwise you will not reach out and education won’t take place, this learning can’t happen. What do you feel Prem?

CP: Yes its very true. We have a group of people working there, and the people who are interacting with them are minimal, just the two of us mostly. Between the two of us, if there’s any difference of opinion, it has to be sorted out before it reaches them. So, whatever I say or Amma says has to be the same. If I have something that I’m unsure of, I say, look, it’s better if you talk to her.

SP: We make sure we don’t give different messages.

CP: As long as you make sure that they feel that the message is the same from both of us, it makes the process of delivery easier. This is very important, I feel, whether it’s a small organization or even a big organization. Take a larger organisation: If in the organisation you have a committee and the committee meets and decides something; if in the committee four people are for and three people are against the decision, they will say, look, please make a note that though I’m not for this decision I am going along with it. However, often amongst the three who have disagreed a couple of them will not support it even outside. Once that happens it gets diluted. But, if as a committee everybody takes responsibility for the group’s decision and no one carries their individual opinion outside, then there would be no problem at all. But that does not happen in large organizations so easily.

SP: There can never be complete agreement, now, that’s a myth. To get a group of people who are in the decision making body to be able to agree, you have to discuss, come to a certain understanding and then that’s what goes through. But unless you have the structure of “this or nothing” - you have to do this or you’re out of the group - it is complicated. That’s how large organizations function, you have a clear structure. Now, we don’t want to do that. We want to work as a community, therefore it becomes very important to be able to talk with each other, come to an understanding and then go with that understanding. It takes time to build such a group and if it forms and stays together for a long time then it will work. It takes time.

I don’t think we’ve forced a relationship, it’s just evolved and that’s partly because we’ve also done it very slowly. We’ve never wanted to immediately grow large or meet major targets. We’ve got a small program and we’re trying to sustain it. Let us see how long we can sustain without depending on too many things. With the limited knowledge and resources these people have we must give them some time to grow and become confident. Right now Kaigal can leap in many directions, it is ready. Each of these guys can work with someone else and can take off. But it’s taken about five and a half years of working quietly in a small way for a lot of things to have happened. Enormous things.

I think the biggest aspect of our education program is not the Sanctuary Schools, but rather what the group itself learns: Chandra, Krishnamurthy, Mani, the teachers, all of them. They are all part of this system and they’ve all worked and they’re actually managing the whole program by themselves to a large extent, which is a very important aspect of
To sustain such a program you need to have a group emerging from the community who can manage it in that place without external support. But of course, monetary support is a big necessity. A program of this kind can never become monetarily self-sufficient. If you’re going to educate tribal communities, at no point are they going to be able to pay you a fee. I’m sure that given the time some things will be alleviated, but they may always need a certain support from people like us who live in a more conventional situation, because we can contact people who will trust us and help out, but may not trust Krishnamurthy or C.

CP: This is a non-profit institution, and there is no revenue from the service provided. There are no targets of money or quantity to meet, like profit making endeavors. They have to project a certain growth and then make sure they reach that projection. That is not fixed here. But what is definitely seen is that if there is quality input there will be an output and growth in a more complex way. Concentration is put enormously on the input in all forms, from education to support and relations with people. We are not going to measure the output, which is the problem with large scale industries, because they have their eyes always pegged on the output rather than the input.

In a profit making industry it is the profit that drives the industry whereas here the driving force might be a notion of personal development or something.

SP: Yes, I think the growth here is a lot more intangible, because in all of this there are some other costs that we’re very unconsciously trying to avoid, which are the environmental costs. So even when you’re looking at value-addition, livelihood and so on we don’t want to sacrifice the forests. A lot of targets can be met if you sacrifice environmental concerns. Because they are never considered as costs, the profits seem very high. But if we don’t incur those costs then we may not reach those profits and that’s not our objective. But I think the overall intangible profits will be much, much higher. If the main objective of our whole program is conservation – and education is for conservation - then that’s how it would be. Anything that aims to conserve will always be very low-key, very small and the benefits will be intangible.

CP: Intangible in the short term... the tangibility may take a lifetime.

SP: Yes and these are the features of sustainability. We are looking at the sustainability of whatever we do and not short-term profits. To me, sustainability means to sustain the forests. Anything that will sustain nature - the soil, the water - that is sustainability, not sustaining high incomes or whatever, which may not be practical. We’re looking at people who need more money, all of that is there, but I’m searching for a kind of development, which will destroy less and still bring about the growth of human beings. Because, if we have to destroy the forests to help them earn an income I don’t think I’m interested in that. Anyway, everywhere in the world that’s what everyone is doing and that is what is happening in the cities. So, what’s so great about going all the way to a tribal community to tell them to cut all of their forests and quickly make money. I don’t need to be there to do this, any industrialist will do this better than me. My whole objective is different.
Living in Almost-Places

Sarah Ross

The history of American suburbanization is full of comments from suburb dwellers such as: “Safety is an issue. I feel safe in the community. we know the neighbors really well.” These comments often affirm two things: there is a solidarity with the familiar and there is something or someone who is outside, or opposes, that solidarity.

While one can begin to unpack the psychic boundaries of race, class and the Other that ooze from such statements, what is not readily disclosed is the history and construction of legal boundaries that help enforce and maintain “safe” spaces, neighbors that we “know” and desires for a sense of place.

In many contemporary American suburbs, documents and rules travel from local governments, to developer, to home/apartment/condominium owner/occupier and eventually to the Home Owner’s Association (HOA). With shade trees and recreation areas, they are the fastest growing real estate market in the country, and in some communities, they are mandated by local municipalities and are called “common interest developments” or CIDs. Political scientist Evan McKenzie describes their workings: developers acquire land, target a demographic, and draw up covenants and restrictions for the land that the new dwellings will occupy. Covenants and restrictions should reflect the aesthetic, fiscal and moral value of the prospective buyers. The dwellings are built and the developer sells enough dwellings with covenants and restrictions attached, to hand over enforcement duty to a newly formed Home Owners Association (HOA). The HOA then modifies, creates and enforces these rules. The HOA is recognized as a private corporation and is subject to corporation law.

Each development has different rules. For example, my sister’s neighborhood in Charlotte, NC restricts flagpoles, but not flags attached to the house, while my parent’s development restricts clotheslines and vehicles advertising businesses in the neighborhood. Countless other developments have pioneered and carefully pruned their sites to restrict everything from certain colors, fruiting trees, animals, children and their noises. What begins to take shape is a design plan aimed at creating the look of a particular place- with color palate and exterior design ensemble included. In other words, the aesthetics of a façade— roofing, siding, woodwork, bricks, stones, shrubs, grass, lighting, depth of yard, drive, walk, decor of mailbox, and more – become subject to law. Deviance from these codes of surface can, and has, landed in many court, disputing the legislation of conformity.

The common interest development and home owners associations are part of the American fabric. This type of suburban development has been worked into the landscape since the late 1800’s, but first, it had to be invented. Architectural writer, Sam Jacobs, describes the suburban invention:

“City and country existed as a phenomena before they became articulated as an idea. Suburbia, however was an idea that coincided with, if not preceded its creation. Simultaneously a concept and a construction site, Suburbia was forced into existence by opposite pairings: by technology and nostalgia, desire and fear. This process began when the industrial revolution took the city and blew it up to hideous proportions, stinking, riddled and gross.”

In the U.S., early suburban neighborhoods such as Kenilworth, Chicago (1889), Forest Hills Gardens, New York (1908) and Hancock Park, Los Angeles (1920) were, from their inception, designed to be exclusive, idyllic and mostly white and affluent. Though suburban rhetoric, at least initially, described something else. Historian Mary Corbin Sies discusses groups of early 20th century suburban home owners, who crafted manuals for the best home design, such as one well known writer who instructs: “A well-ordered home...is a tremendous missionary society. The light streaming from its windows is an ever-burning beacon of safety to our most cherished social institutions.” In 1932, President Hoover’s Conference on Home Buildings and Home Ownership described an ideal home: “The detached one-family house on an adequate lot in pleasant surroundings expresses the housing ideals and aspirations of most American families, particularly those with small children.”

If the space between the houses, the setback lines or architectural mandates didn’t adequately code the neighborhood, then confrontation could. In 1948, after the Supreme Court ruled against racial covenants, Nat King Cole bought a 12 room $45,000 house in Hancock Park, a neighborhood home to wealthy doctors, lawyers and businessmen. Neighbors mobilized to keep Cole out, eventually having the Hancock Park Home Owner’s Association offer a buy out. Cole refused and the HOA requested a meeting. Maria Cole remembers: “There it was patiently explained to my husband that the good people of Hancock Park simply did not want any undesirable moving in.” Mr. Cole responded: “Neither do I, and if I see anybody undesirable coming in here, I’ll be the first to complain.”

Today, the aesthetics and language of suburbia is found in both city and country. “Pioneering” urban dwellers and suburbanites alike reside in tailored communities by joining home owner’s associations, condo committees and apartment cooperatives. Each site and organization demonstrates desires for a place to call one’s own. The mechanisms enabling the widespread trend in these varied, yet exclusive, communities are many: municipalities need new development, but won’t raise taxes for infrastructure; developers profit by using cheap, unwanted land by selling brand and luxury: buyers, eager for the square footage and sense of place, safety and communality, pay the price. The occupation of these neighborhoods shifts over time: the surface of the neighborhood will change, new

The entrance has a triple function: to member-neighbors, the entrance creates a visual spectacle, waterfalls, ponds, or other 'natural' elements, others have guard houses or mechanized gates. Carefully hand painted, well lit with spotlights and landscaped. Some entrances have waterfall colonies, especially when ordering from the menu category "Neighborhood Favorites."8

While Applebee's constructs the same menu and 'neighborhood restaurant' across the globe, many American suburbs similarly aim to create a specific, individualized identity. By honing in on the particulars a facade and conflating aesthetics with cleanliness, safety and class aspiration, common interest developments, in effect, use visual culture to their advantage. On frequent visits to various suburban neighborhoods, I've been struck by a common trend - another facade, which marks the boundary of these spaces. The entrances are often elaborated with names: Oak Bluff, Burning Tree, Sardis Plantation, Robinwood Estates, Bell Grove, Candlewyck, Wessex Square, The Magnolias, The Forest, Timberlake, Sun City, Princeton, Settlers Landing, Paces Commons, Oak Creek Estates, Providence Glen. Each name is articulated in carved wood, cut out of brass, masoned in stone or carefully hand painted, well lit with spotlights and landscaped. Some entrances have waterfalls, ponds, or other 'natural' elements, others have guard houses or mechanized gates. The entrance has a triple function: to member-neighbors, the entrance creates a visual language for the whole community, a reminder of their selective demographic and their sense of belonging with each other. Entrances also set a standard of upkeep, setting an example for the rest of the development. Although there are no direct ties to the aesthetics of the entrance and the type of restrictions the community might enforce, by selecting a type, texture, and material ensemble, implications are set, and their 'almost place-ness' is articulated. Most, if not all entrances are visible from the street and replicated throughout the neighborhood. The third function of the entrance should be to signal to non-member-neighbors dis-identification with surface/facade – a gentle: 'this is not your space, it's ours'.

In this way, CIDs are similar to the 'almost place' of chain restaurants. Take for example, Applebee's, a private corporation owning 1,900 restaurants in 49 U.S. states and 17 other countries. Their advertising jingle is "Eatin' Good in the Neighborhood", and their model, like that of so many other chain markets, succeeds by establishing a narrow parameter in which the diner feels she can "be part of something exciting" and have a personal experience, especially when ordering from the menu category "Neighborhood Favorites."8

A brief survey of these named, marked spaces show their "investment in consumption spectacle, the selling of image of place."9 But the entrances not only sell the image of place, they also establish it. Just one sign of many in a private corporation, such as a HOA neighborhood, the entrance sign literally notes 'aesthetics are subject to law here'. They mark, not only 'member-neighbor solidarity', but the way surfaces and facades can operate, infiltrate and here, adjudicate. These communities, not tied to place, but rather to status specificity (bound up in the rhetoric of safety and community) create a lens in which alliances are magnified and others are distanced. Sam Jacob states, "Suburbia allowed us to escape from the ties of circumstance: geography, place community, class and history. It also allowed us to invent where we were going."10

While Applebee's, a private corporation owning 1,900 restaurants in 49 U.S. states and 17 other countries. Their advertising jingle is "Eatin' Good in the Neighborhood", and their model, like that of so many other chain markets, succeeds by establishing a narrow parameter in which the diner feels she can "be part of something exciting" and have a personal experience, especially when ordering from the menu category "Neighborhood Favorites."8

Where we are going – both back to the urban core, and to the edges of the city – is characterized by how we invent it. If the garden city, the company town, or the gated community weren't enough to prescribe a community, CIDs might be. Alliances likenesses, combined with a fear of abstract crime, potential change and varying values drive residents to create, abide by and enforce rules that, superficially, rule out such contingencies in both landscape and demographics. For the right price, CID member-neighbors can create a community drawn from a particular palate, based not just on communal facilities, but on commonality to an ideal self. Here, creating one's space -an enclave, safe from phantoms of the city, that looks like 'we' do-- is the ability to reshape both the physical and psychic landscapes of the urban, suburban and beyond.

8 http://www.applebees.com/MediaLanding.aspx


10 Jacob, Sam. 2006. "Utopia of Fear."
Conversation with Jonah Bokaer

Erin Ming Lee

New York—June 14, 2007

Erin Ming Lee: Let’s start by talking about your relationship with digital media, how it began and why you are invested in it.

Jonah Bokaer: My work in digital media began through encountering the work of Merce Cunningham. I was actually recruited by his dance company and joined when I was 18. After that, Merce began developing a series of solos for me using the choreography software DanceForms 1.0, which is available through Credo Interactive. This was a big introduction to his process of keyframing, which is a very simple, three-frame production manner of placing movement on a timeline and animating it. He turned to that tool in 1990, I believe, because of his advancing arthritis – so it really is an “extension” in a very practical sense of the word. That set the stage for my appetite and my interest in these tools, and how they relate to dance. There is also Merce’s repertory that relies heavily on the film/video arts and motion capture. Also, encountering his piece “BIPED” from 1999 was a big introduction.

That brings up the idea of the machine being an extension of the body or the body being an extension of the machine – how do these issues come into play for you? Since you do not have arthritis, it might be a different process for you and perhaps you have a different investment in it.

That's true. I think that Merce turned to this software as a way to continue to evolve physically as a choreographer (who is now 88) and as such, he is able develop movement through these tools. For me, I wanted to approach it because – well, backtracking a little bit: my father was a filmmaker, and I grew up around his independent cinema. Seeing so much film growing up had a bigger impact on me than I realized. So for me, that's a precursor to questions about the use of technology for dance.

Technology would seem to suggest a disruption of the natural, organic processes that we assume with dance and the moving body. I wanted to figure it out, because there is a lot of mystery surrounding the use of software choreography: it is important to mention that Merce does not show the technology to his dancers. It's a tool that he uses almost like sketching and one can dance for decades in his company and not interact with the software. So I was curious about why it exists in such a private domain. I think it's because he doesn't want dancers mimicking something that they've seen on screen. He wants them to come to it with their own ideas. The software is publicly available - you can buy it for about $120.00, which I did, and I started animating just without knowing much.

Did that stem from your own curiosity about what Merce’s process was like?

I was curious about what was behind closed doors, so to speak, and I also began training in Media and Visual Art at The New School around that time. I was doing a lot of work with film/video editing, with some graphics, some effects, some code, information architecture and web-based stuff. I started animating movement mainly in hotel rooms and airports just while traveling, since I could work on a laptop. Before even making my first dance, I had an entire hard drive full of material - trying things, failing, attempting to explore movement in a different way. This process stemmed from curiosity with the way that Merce was working, but also it was a natural process stemming from my studies at the time. The first dance piece that I made completely collapsed the figure; there are a lot of presuppositions in this program DanceForms: the figures remain upright and vertically oriented, the figures are gendered, and they have utopian abilities in their joints. I started to dissect those suppositions, and actually decomposed the body further, to create impossible anatomies or impossible surfaces. I got inspired by postmodern architecture, which creates unrealistic physical spaces and in an attempt to build or execute them, something else happens. The point is that the goal is impossible, but the process produces something else. So what I started doing was applying this tool very differently, and doing things that weren't anatomically sound. That's also a facet of how the software works.

That makes sense with a lot of your pieces. Because I am not familiar with this software, could you briefly explain how it works?

There are three main windows. It is very basic: there's a screen that shows the body in stage space, a timeline that shows how many frames are passing by and what happens when, and there's a figure for editing the body parts - actually clicking and dragging and moving and articulating the body parts.

Can you dismember the body parts?
You can’t dismember them, but you can move any body part 360 degrees in three planes of direction! It’s those basic things, you have space, you have time, you have the body. And you import a figure that’s either male or female, in either ballet or modern idioms, then you start to tick along and build movement in time. But since then I have moved onto playing with other kinds of 3D software and Maya Animation.

I wonder if the original intention of that software was for people to create dances out of it.

A way to document…

Yes. Because there is Laban Movement Analysis1, but not everybody reads Laban, so a visual document becomes easier. As soon as the software company designed it, and Merce began using it, they tailored it to fit his process. And have since then opened it to market.

In your studies at New School when you were studying Visual and Media Studies, it seems that you found a relationship between digital media and dance. Did you also find a connection or an overlap between computer language and dance language or are they two separate things that merge?

I think I did, yes. The common language that I found was between dance and video, which is that both are time-based and both are moving images. What really clicked for me was the relationship between dance as moving images and cinema as moving images and how to intensify that relationship – how to change it, create slippage, or create collapse.

Yes, this idea of collapse, it seems like it is a recurring idea for you whether you are collapsing your joints or traditional ideas of movement and sound. Could we talk more about collapse?

It’s a central idea behind the way that I have been working for a long time. I think of collapse as both a physical property (it’s a verb that describes what the body can do), and also a paradigmatic revision of an order, an assumption, a system. Therefore, the idea is physical, but has to do with meaning at the same time. One example of collapse involves the hierarchies of the body’s joints. We stand up on two legs, our joints are aligned in a certain way, our limbs are set up to move in a certain way, but you can collapse them by holding the joints, rotating them, and playing with planes in a new way, depending on your vocabulary. So literally, the body can collapse, and that often involves the floor, or the wall, or the dead space around the body.

The physical collapse in your work is really beautiful. I want to go back to the idea of film, even though a lot of your work uses video. I want to refer to film because of its tactility and the actual cutting involved in its editing that makes it different from video. There is a notion that the viewing of cinema stemmed from the viewing of anatomy…2

Oh, interesting. Well, motion capture is also relevant, and this is where we dig in. Photography and dance, or photography and the body, are wedded because of the work of Edward Muybridge. Muybridge, early on at Stanford University, was commissioned to study human gait analysis in quadrupeds and the way that they galloped. His photography studies were designed to study the body in motion – discus throwers, fighters, boxers, fencers and jumpers. That was early motion capture, but also photography and cinema, in a way, because it’s time-based, frame-by-frame capture - early animation and documenta-

Returning to the idea of anatomy and cinema, I was thinking about how in cinema the camera moves across a scene and makes a visible gesture of dissecting the space through narrative, movement, and the elements within the shot. Through editing, a fragmentation occurs, of the body of the scene, and I see a similarity between this breakup and the idea of collapse in your work.

Absolutely, the segmentation of the body and its parts also relates to the language of cinema and editing, because quite literally, you cut and paste.

I noticed too that a lot of your work operates as homage to or is influenced by canonical figures from modern art like Marcel Duchamp or Jasper Johns, but at the same time you are playing with contemporary modes of digital media or 3D animation. How do these things overlap for you and do you feel that it is important to combine these elements?

I bring in subject matter beyond process, or beyond theory, and I aim to embrace content rather than staying purely abstract. I made a series of works that dissect the modern canon through Duchamp, Rauschenberg, Johns, and their work. Those pieces were mainly solo works, and took apart ideas about portraiture and the body - but also, the connection for me has to do with the “readymade”. The “readymade”, in its traditional Duchampian use, is an object that exists through its recontextualization by the artist, in order to reframe the everyday. What I find interesting is that “readymade movement” around the Judson Dance Theater era had a certain meaning. But what if readymade can also mean computer-generated? If it is computer-made, is it readymade? If you create movement before even performing it, is it readymade? If you can print out a passage of choreography or email it and export it, is it readymade? And can you learn it? So that’s sort of the Duchampian flip.

I think it is also interesting to talk about the way one views your performance and your body, between you in real time, and you in recorded time, and then you doing the recorded time, and all these layers of you playing with time.

Here’s one thing that just came to mind: Christian Marclay really expands on traditions of Duchamp and Fluxus. I know Christian, because he has performed a lot with Merce’s company as a musician and collaborator. I follow his work very closely, was inspired by his sense of decomposition of media, and I tried to reapply some of those ideas to dance. So if you think about a collapsing body, or decomposing body that is mediated, there is then a third line to draw between the properties of the body and the properties of the media.

That reminds me of some observations I made during “False Start”. There was a nice parallel between you eating the apple, the sound of the chewing and then the sound of you typing on your Apple keyboard. Whenever you had the projected, flattened image of you, you yourself would become flat in space in order for us to see the flattened version of you. There was a nice mirroring

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1 Laban Movement Analysis (LMA), Devised by Rudolf Laban, is a system and language for understanding, observing, describing and notating all forms of movement.

2 There is a discussion by Giuliana Bruno on the transition between the viewing of anatomy and the viewing of cinema. She speaks of film techniques and their parallel with dissection and cutting, “Just like the anatomical gaze, the cinematic gaze dissects by moving across and in depth, plunging into space and traversing it.” Giuliana Bruno, Public Intimacy: Architecture and the Visual Arts (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), pp. 90-95.
of the two bodies. Before we get into “A Cure for Surveillance”, I wanted to ask you what you think of when you think of surveillance.

This is where the intersection of movement and technology can take on a political dimension, in my point of view, because we are recorded for much of the day in public space (or even in private space) without consent, so there is a nonconsensual based recording of people, their movement, their images and their activities. That also happens unconsciously in human interaction, and it’s also a contributing factor to the kinds of racial profiling that unfortunately happens in airports. Suddenly, one could say: dance is movement in space, but travel is movement across borders or across continents, and the agents for that are a plane, or train, or some kind of locomotion or movement. So passage (movement) between geographical spaces becomes politicized, in my opinion. Think about x-ray, or motion-capture, which has been used to track criminals, and has been employed in airports as well. You know, motion capture emerged out of a line item in the national defense budget…

I think a lot of digital technology and media is first used for military purposes, and then mass consumption later.

There is a political dimension: who is permitted passage and who it is denied to, and for what reasons? Liubo Borissov’s and my idea behind the installation “A Cure For Surveillance” came from being profiled at airports.

You are both profiled at airports?

Yes, consistently, I almost always am. I travel in a dance company that is predominantly Caucasian and I have both a Lebanese stamp and an Israeli stamp in my passport and have Mediterranean features - there are some alarms that go off.

This idea of borders and boundaries, and who gets to pass over them, brings to mind Jia Zhangke’s “The World”. I thought about this in terms of surveillance and how travel becomes administered, controlled or denied. In “A Cure for Surveillance” motion capture technology and live feed heighten one’s awareness of self and of surveillance technology. I am curious how you and Liubo saw this piece functioning specifically at Dance Theater Workshop.

The use of motion capture for dance, and for artistic purposes, or for documentation, is right at the front of my interest and practice. One of the Board Members of Chez Bushwick has built a 24-camera motion capture facility in Brooklyn. It is a very special facility: having access to it is incredible, and has changed the way that I am able to work. I can pre-visualize movement and actually explore.

What were we thinking about behind A Cure for Surveillance is this: I introduced a missing figure in a duet. Choreographed and improvised material occurred for 3D capture and one body was mapped, while the other was not. So there were partnering sequences happening, but one partner was invisible. One person is being assisted, lifted, manipulated, partnered, but without the presence of the other person. There is assisted movement, but invisible, so the erasure becomes a presence too. One person’s presence gets sculpted by the other person’s absence.

3 The World, released in 2004, addresses the idea of borders and travel and where and how is able to travel based on privilege and background. The film takes place at a theme park in Beijing called The World that features attractions like an Eiffel Tower and a Statue of Liberty. The slogan is you never need to leave the them park “The World” to see the world, and even if individuals possessed a desire to leave, many of them are not able to leave.

I wonder if this other body is detectable as people enter the space.

It became clear in some of the passages, and then not as clear in others.

How did you and Liubo meet?

We both received the first installation fellowship at DTW, and that was how we met. Liubo is absolutely extraordinary – he has a PhD in interactive telecommunications, therefore the live work that he is able to do, and the software interactions that he is able to write, are astonishing. He had the installation rigged for speed, where the trajectory of the pedestrians triggered the trajectory for the speed of the phrases in the installation.

In relation to that, in “A Cure for Surveillance” what was your investment between choreographed movement and everyday movement of passers-by.

I am interested in collaging events that are choreographed, set, and which exhibit a certain virtuosity. Then conflating those events with a very different vocabulary that is vernacular and more quotidian. This defamiliarizes the everyday, maybe a la Judson Dance Theater, or maybe reframing the everyday goes back to the “readymade”. Judson becomes very much a banner movement, a point of reference for dance, but I actually think that Duchamp, the readymade, and relational aesthetics are influences. So collaging set material, everyday material, and unpredictable software interactions can contribute to a sense of indeterminacy. If the work exists as a public installation, I am most interested when the element of indeterminacy is involved. I think that there is pronounced indeterminacy in public space, so it is interesting to heighten that, or polarize it. You can harness it to work with you in some way. A lot of single-channel video gets used in public space. A LOT of single-channel video, and yet there’s not a lot of……well, let’s just say there is a big myth around the idea of interactivity. So, very little video work is interactive. Here’s what I mean: is the content reflexive and does the content depend on the viewer? Or, is it just televised?

I am sure a lot of people asked you this, but when you titled it A Cure for Surveillance

What’s the cure?

Yes, did you see it as a cure or did you just see it as a way of playing with how we see ourselves, and our level of awareness of surveillance?

I think conceptually, to push the project further, the cure would be to develop awareness of how the video system operates. Anyone that walks into DTW’s lobby is being recorded, so perhaps the cure is that they actually start playing and dance. But no, maybe the cure is that they begin watching themselves: self-surveillance. Becoming a viewer instead of the viewed, and not only that, but viewing virtual figures, a whole new moving agent. The idea is to interrupt the normal order of the environment. So maybe a synonym instead of a cure is antidote.

I guess a lot of people like the idea of surveillance because it makes them feel safer. I want to bring up the term voyeurism in conjunction with surveillance, how they are perhaps similar actions with different intentions. One is performed for the sake of safety and the other reads as more sinister. It brings to mind Catherine Liu’s essay addressing surveillance, which suggests that

we have adapted to surveillance by the gadgets we purchase and use and through mass entertainment and the logic of reality television. We perhaps become accustomed to surveillance by the very items we choose to surround ourselves with.

Yes, and often through oblivion – that’s interesting.

I was thinking that the people who invite surveillance are not necessarily the people who are threatened by surveillance. The thing is, most surveillance today is nonconsensual. It’s a closed loop, it’s recorded, and it’s for a viewer. Surveillance contains a subject, and creates an outside viewer throughout. It’s like dramatic irony - the subject might not know that they’re viewed. So maybe the cure is that they’re in on the game.

I think a lot of people when they walk into a space and see their image projected from a live feed, are usually amused by it. You see someone walk into a store and glimpse their image and perform for the camera, they get excited, there is this sort of desire to project or to be perceived in this other sphere.

New York—August 14, 2007

“The new surveillance” — which professor David Lyon calls “dataveillance” — often ignores the physical body and instead tracks one’s informational doppelganger... “In light of this quotation taken from The Soft Cage/Surveillance in America From Slavery to the War on Terror5, could you respond to this aspect of surveillance, that tracks an individual on a day-to-day basis in terms of purchases, cell phone calls, library cards, credit cards, internet surfing - a person’s whereabouts and actions are now trackable beyond the scope of a security camera. This idea of dataveillance seems particularly related to your work because of your use of a database of movement and your use of software technology in creating new pieces.

Dataveillance does relate strongly to movement, and an avant-garde audience will naturally see its connection to choreography. Through the course of a day, a citizen’s locomotion throughout public space is mapped through passive and aggressive observation of pedestrian activity. This could involve both the swipe of a debit card in a grocery store (passive), and the camera that records the performance of that action (aggressive). To go further, some public facilities make use of a one-way mirror - reflective on one side, and transparent on the other - for purposes of surveillance by the human eye, rather than binary code. This is most common in commercial businesses, and airports or other areas of public transit.

To return to dataveillance, these public practices also relate strongly to issues of national interest, human privacy, and even the Homeland Security Act: scholarship produced by university students, and even personal data from library activity is fair game for observation in dataveillance. We have to recognize that this relates to the body in contemporary society.

The curious thing for me is that most of this data is discarded – it literally becomes obsolete, or is phased out after a certain period of time. It’s rare that this recorded video surveillance becomes useful for forensic evidence; a vast amount of material is just thrown out. With this in mind, Liubo and I wanted to create a project that would have generative power as a database.

I wanted to revisit a question I asked you previously about choreographed movement and everyday movement. Can you expand further on why it is important for you to draw from this archive of pre-recorded movement? Could you also comment on any connections perhaps between the “pre-recorded” and the “policed”?

Most performance theory will completely polarize the pedestrian aesthetics of early postmodern dance and the virtuosity associated with new technologies, and place these practices at opposite ends of an assumed spectrum. I see no reason for this, and seek (again) to collapse those distinctions in my work. Pedestrian movement led to minimalism in dance, while new technologies are used primarily to record pedestrian movement: this produces a “loop” in performance theory, that can be used to explore dance further. Why not use technology to record everyday movement in choreography? This has already happened in motion capture for a very long time. Most biomechanical analyses uses motion capture to study joint velocities, walking, running, and points of impact in the moving body.

An archive is useful for many reasons. It can diversify material for a stage dance by allowing a choreographer to previsualize movement; it can become useful for live video work for a number of “feeds” to interact with an audience; and it can heighten interactivity in public spaces. In “A Cure For Surveillance”, the prerecorded movement acted as an archive – yet the speed of the pedestrians triggered the speed of the response.

It’s a greater leap to draw relationships between the prerecorded and the policed. Again, this can lead to issues of forensics: surveillance is most often used to determine the performance of crime. However, this took on new meaning in the 1990s through the use of media in public space: think of the Rodney King incident (a policed beating), which was recorded not through public surveillance, but through private surveillance – a pedestrian happened to have a video camera on the street. Think also of cabs in San Francisco: many of them have video cameras directed at the passenger.

Do you think you could also talk about the public’s response to “A Cure for Surveillance”? Do you know if people found the piece amusing or confusing? To what degree did people interact with their own images as well as with the pre-recorded figure? Were you able to witness public interaction?

It was hard to witness public interaction with the installation, though I viewed the work almost 7 times at the venue during gallery hours.

The public response was warm, because that venue is not often activated, and people were glad to see public art there. There was fascination and intrigue, because media arts can produce a certain amount of “ooh ahh” when first encountered; this is especially true of motion capture technology, and we had access to a top-notch facility called Worley Works, in Bushwick, Brooklyn.

People were also perplexed, for sure: pedestrians on the outside of the building were encountered with the likeness of their own image on the window, although it was not their image (though it moved at the same speed when they walked by). Taxi cabs also tripped off the outside image, so there was even the potential to screw with traffic patterns.....

I find it interesting that the general public has very little literacy with film & video, yet it’s the most widely accessible art form today: film is everywhere, and we watch digital video on a daily basis through television, the internet, ads in public space, etc.

Last thoughts: “A Cure For Surveillance” attempted to provide a series of links between formal invention, public art, dance/performance, and even a poetic approach to political commentary. There were socially-deliberate choices that went into the work, but the piece can be appreciated as “pure dance,” even though it’s a highly mediated work. It also managed to transform its venue for 3 weeks, and asked the public to reconsider themselves in relation to transformed everyday surroundings, in the context of present-day issues of movement. That’s the accomplishment in my opinion.
A GUIDE TO UNSEXY LANGUAGE

"'Swar nett so schlimm'
-Osterreich Blatt

"Such filth!"
-Christian Ladies Weekly

Wouldn't one want one's partner to know one's own thoughts and desires? The answer is of course yes, but one may not want one's thoughts and desires known to the general public. This is when it becomes useful for partners to develop a code to be used with one another in public situations to express their innermost thoughts and desires without the risk of having fellow riders of public transportation, small children, or prying aunts also knowing these innermost thoughts and desires.

A Guide to Unsexy Language is a guide of words and phrases which can be used in unsexy code language, and those words and phrases to be avoided. Some words and phrases are obvious like bananas, horse-back riding, peaches and the Washington Monument, but others are not so obvious and this guide is meant to help one identify and discern a properly insane word from a possibly sexy one.

no

yes

The juicy pomegranate, like most fruits, makes a poor choice for use in unsexy language. Try the no-nonsense look instead.

no

yes

Wearable items like the 'dickey' should be avoided while sensible items like gaiters are preferable in unsexy code.
Afterswarm
Ann Stephenson

We weren't lost, we were glistening
We got spiritual down by the river
There are certain things I won't do
Not even for forgiveness, though maybe for candy
The big boy doesn't come around anymore
That exorcism finally took
Shook him out his tree and into the river
Keep low to the ground
Like putting a hit out on someone you love
Bees propel to the south side of the building
Swarming in light
At the dedication of the bridge
We stood single file along the river
The huffers gave a hands-on demonstration
I would touch the hive
But feeling hasn't returned to my fingers
Since they took out the stitches
At least my mouth is spring-loaded
Is that a trap?

I heard knocking in the middle of the night
Somebody put a metronome outside the door
I would answer if not for my discomfort
It's raining too hard to run naked through the streets
Leave it to you to introduce a new strain of parasite
One that climbs into an open cut
I gloss over the fact that you have no friends
It's one thing to speak the language
Another to comprehend it
But you seem to understand
What I've been trying to do up in the air