

In the Footnotes of Library Angels: A Bi(bli)ography of Insurrectionary Imagination (2006)

Dear Reader

Before we begin on this journey in search of words and images that speak of the insurrectionary imagination¹; Before we bend those fragile spines and flick through brittle pages to reveal moments where the spirit of art² and activism merge³; Before we drift⁴ through these words, fingering paper, armed with footnotes⁵ guiding our steps across this library. I want to ask you a question - Do you believe in Library Angels?

1 The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination (lab of ii) was founded in 2004 by myself, the artists activist, The Vacuum cleaner (see his DVD - The Vacuum Cleaner, Anti Adverts, 2003 ref: D0180) and radical educator Isabelle Fremeaux. The lab of ii is an ephemeral network of socially engaged artists and activists whose work falls in between resistance and creativity, culture and politics, art and life. It believes that playful forms of cultural intervention in everyday life and the development of free convivial spaces that enable participants to cultivate full confidence in their own creative capacity are fundamental tools for social change. Experiment 1 in Autumn 2004 was part of the big alter-globalisation movement gathering, The European Social Forum. Experiment 2 took place in Summer 2005 and involved touring to 9 cities in the UK with a caravan run on chip fat, infiltrating department stores with 'prayers to products' and training several hundred rebel clowns for civil disobedience at the G8 summit - See The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination – 13 experiments in hope DVD. ref: D0261

2 It is useful to remember that the division between art and life is only a fairly recent one(circa 17th century). For most of human life on this planet and still in most of the (non-western) world, art is embedded into life, not as a separate activity but a fundamental part of society. Alan Kaprow's seminal essay "The Real Experiment" contrasts two traditions: art at the service of art (art like art) and art at the service of life (life like art). He shows that they both represent a fundamentally different philosophy of reality. "We may see the overall meaning of art change profoundly" he writes, " from being an end to being a means, from holding out a promise of perfection in some other realm to demonstrating a way of living meaningfully in this one." This and other incisive essays are collected in Kaprow, Allan and Kelley, Jeff (ed.) Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life - Allan Kaprow, Berkeley: University of California Press. 1996

3 No one is born an art activist, most of us began our work in the confines of the art or theatre establishments and took time to develop our practices outside. Feminist activist artist Suzanne Lacy has illustrated her own development from private to public artist, in an interesting diagram. Beginning with artists as experimenter (private), she moves through artist as reporter, artist as analyst to her present role, artist as activist (public). See (page 263) in the excellent Richard Schechner book, Performance Studies: An introduction. London & New York: Routledge.2002 ref: P0289. For an up to date survey of art activist practices see - Thompson, Nato and Sholette, Gregory. The Interventionists: Users Manual for the Creative Disruption of Everyday Life. Massachusetts: MASS MoCa Publications.2004.ref: P0639. A good primer that looks at works in the late 80's and early 90's is Felshin, Nina, ed. But is it Art?: The Spirit of Art as Activism. Seattle: Bay Press, 1995. For a historical look of the field in the 1970's see Lippard, Lucy, Get the Message? A Decade of Art for Social Change. New York, E.P Dutton, 1984.

4 A key inspiration for many art activists are the Situationists International (SI) - a group of artists and intellectuals who set out to completely re-invent both modern art and radical politics during the 1950-60's. For the SI, both art and politics had to be exciting, satisfying and effective immediately, in the here-and-now and for everyone -- and not in some far off future, some Heaven, or some period after the Great Revolution. One of the techniques they developed was the "derive", meaning 'The drift.' It involved moving freely in urban spaces without aim or direction but influenced by "psychogeography" (the study of a city's emotional landscape). The popular memory of this extraordinary group remains in the poetic graffiti daubed on Paris's walls during the uprising of 1968, much of which was influenced by their writings e.g.: "Be realistic, demand the impossible" and "all power to the imagination". - see Ford, Simon, A User's Guide - The Situationist International 2005 LADA ref P0617

Perhaps you've never heard of them. Let me explain - Last year I was in the British Library, researching clowns⁶ and tricksters⁷ and I came upon a book about synchronicity. I opened it at random and read a story about how the writer Rebecca West had been researching a specific episode of the Nuremberg⁸ war crimes trials. She had been horrified to find that the transcripts were catalogued under completely arbitrary headings and impossible for any researcher to navigate. In frustration she took the first volume that came to hand, carelessly opened it at random to find she was not only holding the correct volume, but had opened it at exactly the right page.

These are the actions of what author Arthur Koestler⁹ calls Library Angels, those absent presences that somehow make the right books fall into our hands, those

5 These footnotes are not an addition to the text, but an equal partner, walking guides to take us through the resources and books in this library and elsewhere.

6 "the clowns are organising... the clowns are organising – over and out..." screeched the Police radio, during an action against Menwith Hill spy base. In 2004 I set up the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA), which developed a form of political activism that brings together the ancient practice of clowning and the more recent practice of Non-violent direct action. The idea behind CIRCA was to develop a resistance methodology that by using clowning techniques would break open up the often brittle hearts and desensitised bodies of activist, enabling them to be more spontaneous and emotionally vulnerable. The tactic transformed situations of civil disobedience actions into ones where there were less dichotomies between the authorities and protesters and where the clown would replace confrontation with confusion. In search of truth and justice and armed with mirth and mockery CIRCA carried out operations wherever necessary. This ranged from shutting down army recruitment agencies, infiltrating a MacDonald's to find 'happiness' and 200 trained clowns blockading roads during the G8 summit in Scotland. There are now CIRCA brigades in the numerous countries including the US, France, New Zealand, Belgium, Denmark, Brazil, the Netherlands and Germany. For writings about CIRCA see - David Harvie, Keir Milburn, Ben Trott, David Watts ed. Shut them Down: The G8, Gleneagles 2005 and The Movement of Movements, Autonomedia/Dissent! 2005.

7 I've always been fascinated by works that eschew traditional binary oppositions and fixed ideologies, that use of parody, absurdity, pranks, slippery identities, deceit and beguiling humour in the face of serious political struggle. These are all characteristics of the Trickster, the cross-cultural figure of folk tale, myth and the ancestor of the contemporary clown. He/she/it - for its gender is often undecided - exists on the borderline between life and art, the selfish and the communal, the real and the imagined, soul and body. The spirit of disorder, the shapeshifting trickster adds chaos to order to create a whole. Lying to tell the truth, the trickster's sly mischief heals the world. A wonderful example of this spirit at work in radical Live art practice is the Yes men. Infamous for their hilarious forms of culture jamming and "identity correction" whereby they impersonate corporate institutions such as the World Trade Organisation or Dow Chemicals, clandestinely infiltrating the global media and international conferences in their name, the Yes Men have turned the ancient myths of the trickster into a high tech contemporary practice. See The Yes Men: The True Story of the World Trade Organisation. New York:Disinformation.2004 and their feature length documentary, The Yes Men: Changing the world one prank at a time, MGM studios inc. 2006.

8 When exploring the relationship between art and politics we cannot ignore the extraordinary and terrifying use of aesthetics and spectacular performance by the Nazi's during the 30's. This problematic relationship has led a many artists and activists to be wary of merging art and politics too closely. This timid position was courageously rejected by Artist Joseph Beuys working in post war Germany. The aim of art for Beuys was its ability to make people free. His notions of social sculpture, which saw society as the material for artists to transform, were to be key inspirations for my practice and for those of Platform who I worked with between 1985-1997 (see note 6) The art market has often failed to represent his radical ideas preferring to overshadow them with his objects and performances, yet his philosophy of art and society continues to be one of the most radical positions of the 20th century. See: Joseph Beuys, Ideas and Actions, 1988 ref: P0500 and Alain Borer, The Essential Joseph Beuys, 1996 ref: P0125

9 Arthur Koestler described library angels as, "in charge of providing cross-references." See Olson Geoff, Is the Universe Friendly, in Common Ground magazine, October 1994.

strange creatures of coincidence who open pages perfectly for us when we least expect it.

I put the book down and gazed over the reading desk at the person sitting in front of me. He was one of those characters that seems to dwell permanently in libraries, a large dusty sedentary bespectacled man, reading “A Train of Powder” by Rebecca West. The very book that collects her Nuremburg trials writings. Of all the hundreds upon thousand of volumes in the British library, of all the hundreds of seats in this reading room, how could it be that I happened to have sat in front of this person, with this particular book in his hands.

Perhaps it was the library angels visiting me again, trying to prove their existence and whispering in my ear the question which Albert Einstein thought was the most important a human can ask – “Is the Universe Friendly?”

So dear reader – do *you* believe in Library Angels?

If you do then let’s start this winding journey asking questions¹⁰ knowing that the accidents of angels are there to guide us. If you don’t, it doesn’t matter, because they will reveal themselves to you in the fullness of time.

That’s if there is much time left. My guess is that if your interested in the meeting place of art and activism¹¹ you probably don’t believe in the ‘hope for the best’ fallacies of capitalism¹² or the myopic myth of eternal progress¹³. Maybe you recognise the irrational

¹⁰ “walking we ask questions” say the Mexican indigenous rebels the Zapatistas, whose spokes-person the masked subcommandante Marcos is perhaps one of the worlds most inspirational and politically effective performance artists. While Joseph Beuys turned art into activism, brilliantly articulating the socially transformative role of the artist, I feel it was Marcos who showed me how to apply such an understanding to places outside of the personal artist’s ego and the art world. Marcos turned activism into an art, in the most collective way possible, by creating Zapatismo – a movement that combined a post-modern performative politics with ancient Mayan indigenous belief systems and ways of life. A savvy manipulator of global media, a rebel poet, a man who tells stories about a funny beetle called Durrito. Marcos lives in the borderland, on the edges of armed insurgency and poetic storytelling, media performance and radical politics. His beautifully written communiqués that have emanated from the jungle of Chiapas since the uprising of 1994 have catalysed the global movements against corporate globalisation and injected a powerful dose of creativity into contemporary forms of resistance. For more see - Marcos, Subcommandante. Our word is our Weapon: Selected writings Subcommandante Insurgente Marcos. New York: Seven Stories Press. 2001 and Guillermo Gomez-Pena’s chapter “The ‘subcommandante’ of performance” (page 222) in his Dangerous Border Crossers, 2000, ref:P0117 .

¹¹ All art is political – not just art that claims its political agency. What could be more political than an art installation bought by a multi millionaire advertising executive as an investment and Public Relations gesture to show his rebel credentials (think Charles Saatchi and the Brit art pack) or a spectacular piece of contemporary performance funded by a multinational oil company. Complicity and silence are political, saying nothing when faced with a society at permanent war with itself and the planet, is a political act. Philosopher Herbert Marcuse however, argued that all art had within it the seeds of liberation and the more obviously political a work was, the less radical and transformative potential it had. For a fascinating debate around these questions see – Carol Becker’s essay – Herbert Marcuse and the subversive potential of art – in her edited collection - The Subversive Imagination: Artists, society and social responsibility - New York and London: Routledge, 1994.

¹² Since the early 60’s Gustave Metzger’s work has been a systemic critique of the art world and capitalist values. In Ken McMullen’s DVD about his work, Metzger defines capitalism as a system based on the production of dissatisfaction - see Gustave Metzger, Pioneers in Art and Science: Metzger, 2004, ref:D0226. His movement for the auto-destructive art was in the footsteps of the 20th century avant-garde such as Dada whose 1919 manifesto demanded that “The new artist protests, he no longer paints ; he creates directly life and art make One.” For a short partisan history of these radical movements. see - Home, Stewart - The Assault on Culture - Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War, 1991 ref: P0733

lunacy of a consumer utopia¹⁴ of unlimited economic growth on a finite world. Perhaps you would agree with me that the future is as fragile a place as the planet and time is running out.

Last week my eleven year old son Jack said to me: “Dad, they’ve invented real laser guns – that you can carry around – That means we are *officially* in the future now doesn’t it.”

I wanted to respond by saying: “What future¹⁵ ?”
I kept my mouth shut...

In 1989¹⁶ whilst I was working with the socially engaged¹⁷ art group Platform¹⁸ we produced a postcard proclaiming: “The question of art is no longer aesthetics but the

¹³ Archaeologist, historian and novelist Ronald Wright's "A Short History of Progress" demonstrates how numerous civilisations collapsed because they ignored their natural limits. Analysing the patterns of 'the trap progress' he notes that civilisation after civilisation, when faced with ecological collapse have simply ignored the situation, continued to act in ever increasingly arrogant and destructive ways, until its too late. "The future of everything we have accomplished since our intelligence evolved will depend on the wisdom of our actions over the next few years" he writes "Like all creatures, humans have made their way in the world so far by trial and error, unlike other creatures, we have a presence so colossal that error is a luxury we can no longer afford." See Wright, Ronald, (2004) A Short History of Progress, Anansi, Toronto.

¹⁴ One of Britain's most prolific 19th century political artists and utopians was William Morris. Little do people know, when they are buying their expensive Morris designed wallpaper from Liberties, that he was one of the most radical thinkers of his time; a tireless revolutionary romantic, essayist, painter, designer, poet and political organiser, who worked with all the great communists and anarchists of his time. For Morris, art had "to create a new consciousness that moves away from the immediate towards the possible". His utopian novel, News From Nowhere was a stinging critique of the sordid nightmares of Victorian capitalism. It presented a convincing dream of a post-capitalist ecological English society, where city squares became orchards, schools and money were abolished and the houses of parliament transformed into a store for compost. Perhaps this visionary had an inkling that in the future the popular recognition of his work would be relegated to the shelves of luxury department stores when he wrote "I pondered all these things, and how men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name." See Thompson, E. P., William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary. London:Pantheon, 1976.

¹⁵ Projecting our imaginations into the future can be an obstacle as can its sometime companion hope. Because hope can make us forget that the only moment we can really have any control of is the present. History is always unexpected yet every act we take now can make all the difference in the way the future mysteriously unfolds. "To hope is to gamble" writes cultural theorist Rebecca Solnit "It's to bet on the future, on your desires, on the possibility that an open heart and uncertainty is better than gloom and safety. To hope is dangerous, and yet it is the opposite of fear, for to live is to risk" - see her wonderful little book about imagination and activism - Hope in the Dark: The Untold History of People Power. Edinburgh: Cannongate, 2005.

¹⁶ 1989 was a year of extraordinary social change across the world, especially in Eastern Europe. Hidden from the official history of this period is the fact that many of the popular uprisings against the Soviet state were catalysed by groups of radical cultural workers. The revolutions in Eastern Europe were ignited not only by the big names that we know, Vaclav Havel, Charter 77, Polish Solidarity etc. but by a new wave of playful protests put on by guerilla theatre groups, musicians and anarchist artists that made it safe to go into the streets again. This little known story is a fantastic illustration of how history forgets (conveniently) that its often the small radical cultural acts of audacity and imagination that light the spark that pushes even the biggest empires over the edge. For how serious play ignited a revolution see Kenney, Padraic, A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989, , Princetown University Press 2002.

¹⁷ The term socially engaged art has become common currency for work which attempts to have a direct relationship with a public. Unfortunately some of this work tends to merely reproduce values of art world and museum culture – see ed. Various - Can We Come Back?, Ikon gallery and creative

survival of the planet”. Now it is stuck above the door to my workspace, everyday I ask myself: is this really the question of art?

Aesthetics¹⁹ – from the Greek word - aes-thesia - meaning the ability to perceive, to experience, to feel through our bodies²⁰. At the root of the aesthetic is somatic sensation, a profound noticing of our world. Seen this way, art is perhaps just paying attention²¹ – simply feeling.

It’s a winter Wednesday morning – I wake up to the distorted crackle of radio news

Yesterday 60 people were blown up in Iraq – this morning another 23 bodies were ripped apart.

I feel the cold morning air on my waking skin

A new report is out - Top Climate Scientists suggests that the earth is heating up much faster than they predicted a few years ago – twice as fast – the ice sheets are not just

partnerships Birmingham, 2004 ref:P0644 for an example of work which fails to have a systemic critique. For a fantastic overview of numerous forms of genuine and critical engaged public practices - see Lacy, Suzanne, ed. Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art. Seattle: Bay Press, 1995

18 For over 20 years, PLATFORM has been bringing together environmentalists, artists, human rights campaigners, educationalists and community activists to create innovative projects driven by the need for social and environmental justice. This interdisciplinary approach combines the transformatory power of art with the tangible goals of campaigning, the rigour of in-depth research with the vision to promote alternative futures. For documentation of their work on London’s buried rivers - see the beautifully illustrated - ed. J Kastner and B Wallis, Land and Environmental Art, Phaidon, 1998 ref: P0530

19 For a gorgeous and highly recommended little critical journal (not dreary and academic but alive and thoughtful) that explores contemporary practices that bring art and activism together see - The Journal of Aesthetics and Protest, Los Angeles. Available online too at www.joaap.org

20 The body is of course at the heart of Live art practices. This room is full of books and images of bodies – bodies in pain, naked, strung up, pierced, asleep, wet, fucking, bleeding, fighting, being punished, decorated and adorned – but so often these actions that claim to speak of risk, abjection, politics and society are simply autistic aesthetic acts – gestures that mildly shock within the safe world of high culture, expressions of isolation echoing in the clean white spaces of art protected from the complications of the real world. There’s a big difference between taking risks in the world of art and in the world outside. In the art world when you provoke, disobey the rules, push the boundaries, questions the cannons you get discovered, rewarded, acclaimed. In the real world when you push the social boundaries you are marginalized, surveilled, beaten and imprisoned. For me the body that most touches and effects society is the one that is placed between the cogs of the machine – it is the bodies of protesters in trees defending woodland, the bodies of those standing in front of tanks in Palestine, the bodies jammed in the arms of bulldozers about to destroy another community. See my essay – “The Art of Necessity: The subversive imagination of the No M11 Campaign and Reclaim the Streets” in the epic collection of texts - Duncombe, Stephen. Cultural Resistance Reader, London/New York: Verso. 2002

21 Initiator of Happenings, live art events that attempted to completely dissolve the separation between artists and audience, Alan Kaprow has described art as the process of “paying attention.” Most Happenings were not explicitly political, for an exception see Jean Jacques Lebel’s chapter (page 268) in Sandford, Mariellen ed., Happenings and Other Acts 1995 ref: P0343

melting now, they are breaking off in huge chunks, the gulf stream is slowing down, temperatures could rise by 11 degrees centigrade²².

I put the kettle on the hob...

I look at the blue flames, I smell gas, I imagine oil wells, pipelines, refineries..

What future?

I check my email. Last week I was invited to give a key note talk at a conference entitled Artists of Conscience – they offered me a fee of £1000, a flight to Canada and lodging. I wrote back saying that to fly across our overheating planet for a four day conference, releasing 1.69 tonnes of carbon into the burdened atmosphere, would, unfortunately, *not* leave me with a clear conscience. I offered to send a video explaining why my conscience and concern about climate change keeps me at home. This morning's email says "no thanks, you have to come". I say "no thanks, I'll stay at home."

I wake Jack up, we listen to the few birds chattering outside. I remember Tree sparrows everywhere when I was ten – but since then their numbers are down by 95%. And I wonder who will hear the final call of the very last sparrow.

Jack doesn't want to go to school, I have to coerce him. On the way, the tube train is so packed with commuters that we have to take a deep breath in to fit in the carriage. I read in the morning newspaper that the US ambassador to the UN, John Bolton during the negotiations leading up to the 2005 summit, suggested that the phrase "respect for nature", should be cut from the outcomes document.

Outside the tube station I look at people in suits going to work in the financial district and wonder what it must feel like to believe that the market is God²³, that it will save us. I wonder what the city will look like when climate change has hit hard and when the long emergency²⁴ of depleting energy supplies and collapsing ecological life support systems

22 One of the earliest radical creative movements to work on issues of ecology were the Provos; a Dutch 1960's group founded by artists and anarchists, whose absurd playful happenings provoked, (hence the name Provo) the authorities to respond with excessive force. Every one of their theatrical protests would always be accompanied by an imaginative solution – named a "white plan." Their most famous one being the 'white bicycle' concept, a challenge to the pollution of the "car monster" and private property. Dozens of white bicycles were left unlocked on the streets, the idea being that anyone could ride them for free, leaving them at their destination when finished with and ready for another person to use when needed. The police's horror of communal property led to them to impound all the white bicycles, to which the Provos responded by stealing some of the police's own bikes. The Provo's enormous popular success gained them five seats in Amsterdam city council, which led to their ultimate demise. For more examples of radical performance that subverts electoral politics see Bogard, Larry, *Electoral Guerrilla Theatre: Radical Ridicule and Social Movements*, Routledge, London and New York, 2005.

23 Numerous live artists have been parodying the concept of the market as god. The Reverend Billy with his fake southern preacher character leading the "Church of stop shopping" has been performing often accompanied by his gorgeous subverted Baptist choir, in multinational chains across the world. Despite being banned from all Starbucks in the "known Universe" (their term) he continues to joyfully disrupt the cathedrals of consumption see the DVD *Rev Bill*, Conway Hall, 2004 - ref: D0230. The Vacuum Cleaner's "Prayers to products" takes people into stores to prostrate themselves in front of the goods they most desire – see footage of this in his DVD and the Lab of ii DVD.(see note 1)

24 "We're living in a state of emergency." Says artists Guillermo Gomez-Pena. "I feel that more than ever we must step outside the strictly art arena. It is not enough to make art." His work (which to my mind is too often located in the art world) has attempted to span the space between a directly engaged activist aesthetic and the aesthetics of popular culture. Billed as "chicano-cyber-punk" it takes the form of performance, video and/or writing, exploring colliding cultures and North/South relations. There are numerous books and DVD's by and about him in the resource room – you could start with his book

Last night I couldn't see any stars. They say by 2020 no one will be able to see any stars anymore. That's if the lights are still on.

Perhaps the question is after all one of aesthetics – of sensing, of embodying feeling. Perhaps the question is: how *can* we really *feel* this all encompassing violence, this assault on our lives, our environment, our rights, our hearts, our minds? How can we comprehend with our gut this insane attack on all that is living by a system that prioritises things, abstractions, money?

Many of us pretend that it is not happening, we distract ourselves to get through the day, we do everything we can to forget. *Thou shalt pretend that nothing is wrong*²⁸, is the creed of the market that is god.

In 1994 I began to immerse myself in the direct action²⁹ movements, taking my imagination away from what critic Suzi Gablik calls “the jails of the art world”³⁰ and placing my body in the way of road building machinery and occasionally in the jails of her majesty's police force. In those days those that spoke about the collapse of civilization and of capitalisms collective suicide were mostly the radical ecologist, the virulent anti-capitalists, the Earth First! protesters and a few obsessive reclusive scientists. Many would call them extremists disconnected from society, simplistic neo-luddites, and their Cassandra like cries were ignored and ridiculed. Mainstream media rarely broadcast such millenarian fears and politicians and corporate leaders stubbornly refuted them. But something has changed over the last few years.

28 For more on society turning a blind eye to brutality see Derrick Jensen's terrifyingly touching memoir cum poetic tirade against the endemic violence and barbarism of system that sees the world as an inanimate object, “A Language Older than Words”- London: Souvenir Press.2002.

29 Direct action is un-mediated and immediate action to change something. At its simplest, direct action is about taking direct control of our own lives, and refusing to accept the authority of bureaucrats or politicians, 'leaders' or 'experts' to act on our behalf. It shies away from the dangers and betrayals of representation, and it takes matters into our own hands and acting collectively to address the issues that concern us. If we see someone who is hungry, we cook them a meal, if we think a mega damn should be stopped we refuse to leave our houses when the water begins to rise. It's not about asking others to do things for us, it's doing things for ourselves – its homeless Canadians squatting empty buildings; US Hacktivists blockading the World Trade Organisations website, Indian farmers burning fields of Genetically Modified crops, landless Brazilian peasants rebuilding their lives on occupied land. It is not a tactic of last resort, something that we turn to when all other forms of campaigning; such as letter writing and lobbying have been exhausted. Quite the opposite: it is the preferred way of doing things, it is both a way of working and a model for how we see a future society run. Discovering Direct Action was my moment of deserting the art world, I slowly melted into a social movement, gave up the label of artists (except for when asking for art organisations to fund creative resistance projects), but kept the weapons of creativity by my side and I soon realised that this was the most powerful, inspiring and socially efficacious context that I could use those weapons in. For an overview of the global direct action movement since 1994 see the book that I co-edited – Notes From Nowhere ed., We are everywhere: The irresistible rise of global anticapitalism. London & New York: Verso. 2003 refP0424

30 Suzi Gablik was an enormous influence for me. Her writings developed notions of relational art practices, where the artists position is one of dialogue and embeddedness in the world rather than objective alienated monologue. For more on her work looking at art as a service activity rather than merely an expressive individualistic act see Gablik, Suzi - The Reenchantment of Art. London: Thames & Hudson. 1991

When Britain's Royal Society Professor at Cambridge University and Astronomer Royal, Martin Rees publishes a book entitled *Our Final Century: Will the Human Race Survive the Twenty-First Century?*, in which he states that "The odds are no better than 50/50 that our present civilisation will survive"; when the Pentagon publishes reports describing European cities sinking beneath rising seas caused by abrupt climate change and a future where "warfare would define human life" as "desperate, all-out wars over food, water and energy supplies"³¹ erupt everywhere; when ex NASA scientist James Lovelock ends his devastating analysis of the effects of climate change with a scene of a few survivors emerging from the billions dead, riding camels out of a dry overheated world towards the arctic, where they will attempt to rebuild civilization in a cooler climate.³² We know that the end of the world is no longer the preserve of the freaks on the edges of society but is now a warning coming straight from the establishment.

A psychological study of holocaust survivors revealed that many of them refused to face the seriousness of the holocaust even while it was happening around them. One survivor recounted how his orchestra didn't miss a single beat in the Mozart piece they were playing as they pretended not to notice the smoke from the synagogue being burnt down next door.

Last year, the sister of one of the London 7/7 bombers allegedly wrote an email to her brother encouraging him to go through with the action "We all have to be firm and focused with reality as time is slipping away" she wrote "and there is really no time to be weak and emotional." ³³

Meanwhile in the depths of the academy recent research in "neuro-economics" – which works out ways that neuroscience can understand economic performance - has shown that "people with certain brain lesions, which limited their capacity for emotion, felt less fear, took more risks, and made bigger profits than rivals in a laboratory-based gambling game"³⁴. According to the logic of the market and terror³⁵, success comes to those who have damaged their capacity to feel.

31 see Stip, David, 2006, Pentagon Says Global Warming Is a Critical National Security Issue: Report claims climate could change radically, and fast, in Fortune Magazine, January 26th.

32 Lovelock, James, 2006, *The Revenge of Gaia: Why the Earth Is Fighting Back - and How We Can Still Save Humanity*. Santa Barbara (California): Allen Lane.

33 Reported on the BBC, 6th October 2005 - <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4315896.stm>

34 The Guardian, October 3rd 2005, London - Neuro Economics, Briefing.

35 Subverting the role of terror, the Quebec performance group - Action Terroriste Socialment Acceptable (Socially Acceptable Terrorist Actions - ATSA) make urban interventions that demand public participation and incite questions about history, ecology and the city. From abandoned burning Sports Utility Vehicle's to guerrilla gardening their work simultaneously informs and provokes - See their DVD – ATSA – ref: D0242.

I was 14 when my father died, my mother took me to the doctor because I refused to speak about how I was feeling – it was the same doctor who a few weeks before had administered morphine to my father to soothe his cancer riddled body – “so how are you feeling ?“ the doctor asked, I opened my mouth, paused and projectile vomited across his huge shiny antique desk.

I wish I still knew how to feel like that.

As artists and activists we are somewhat awake to atrocity, somewhat attuned to feeling, it's often the fuel of our actions, the catalysts to our creativity and yet we also know that to feel too much is as paralyzing as feeling nothing at all.

If on that winter Wednesday morning I genuinely felt deep in my gut the Baghdad carnage, the reality of climate change, the mass extinctions - would I really be able to sit calmly and just write?³⁶ Perhaps the only question really worth asking is this: What is the appropriate response to the suicidal insanity³⁷ of our culture? What is our Response – ability?

Answering it is the hardest thing – sometimes if I listen to my gut, my response is to wish I had the nerve to sneak out at night and burn down London's financial district³⁸,

36. Joanna Macy writes and runs workshops for activists on how to work through despair. Combining an understanding of contemporary science, (especially systems theory and cybernetics) with Buddhism, she sees the world and the self as a continuous interdependent phenomenon. The cause of social and ecological crisis, she says, is our pathological notions of the separate self. The abstraction of an isolated “I” is the epistemological fallacy of the western world, a denial of the symbiotic relational nature of reality. Refusing to face our fear and confusion about the state of the world is a refusal to see a deep connection with it, to see how when it is affected so are we. “What looks like apathy” she writes, “is really a fear of suffering.” Staying in touch with the pain enables us to acknowledge the fact that, as father of cybernetics Norbert Weiner said, we are not isolated objects in the world, but “whirlpools in a river of everflowing water. We are not stuff that abides but patterns that perpetuate themselves.” See Macy, Joanne (1991) *World as Lover, World as Self*, Parallax Press, Berkeley.

37 How often have you felt that you were slipping into insanity? Sometimes it takes those who are crazy to have the courage to realise that it is not they who are going mad but society which is insane. If I had to credit one book for propelling me into the world of live art it was the writings of the “mad” Antonin Artaud, which gave me an understanding that to embrace suffering was essential to life and that performance had the potential to push human experience to the limits. See the extract from his *The Theatre of Cruelty* (page 25) in (1996) Huxley, Micheal and Witts, Noel, *The 20th Century Performance Reader*, Routledge, London and New York. Ref: P0119

38 I live on the edges of the fetid powerhouse of global finance, the City of London. This square mile of land, a slick machine for making money out of money at any cost, is a critical canvas for acts of contemporary creative resistance. Working in the audacious direct action collective, Reclaim the Streets on the “Carnival Against Capital” which took place in the City on June the 18th in 1999, was one of the most perfect moments of imaginative insurrection that I have ever experienced. Seeing 10,000 people invading the city streets during a working afternoon wearing carnival masks (we produced 8000 masks to facilitate a complex crowd choreography, involving splitting the crowd into four using the colour coded masks, a strategy that would surprise and flummox the police and enable us to head for our target the London International Futures Exchange) transforming a space of profit and plunder into one of play and resistance, was one of those rare moments when action became the sister of dream. Whilst our wild dancing sabotaged the City of London, thousands of others around the world were simultaneously participating in a global carnival of resistance, ranging from a “Carnival of the Oppressed” in Nigeria, with 10,000 Ogoni, Ijaw and other tribes closing down Port Harcourt , to a spoof trade fair in Montevideo, Uruguay - from Barcelona where a piece of squatted land was turned into an urban oasis overnight , complete with vegetables, medicinal herbs and a lake to an anti nuclear demonstration in Gujerat, Pakistan by trade Unionists , to actions against child labour in Senegal - from Street Parties across the United States to domestic and garment workers demonstrating against the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in Dhaka, Bangladesh . The police reported that they had never witnessed a demonstration with such a “level of sophistication and planning”, art critic Brian Holmes wrote that he had experienced “ A new cartography of ethical-aesthetic practice..(being) invented,

sometimes I dream of planting a beautiful community garden³⁹ that provides food for my neighbourhood, sometimes I think the most important thing is to help build social movements and plan actions that make revolution irresistible, sometimes I think I should do as little as possible, just live in the moment mindfully⁴⁰, try to be a good dad, live lightly and refuse to produce more stuff on this planet crowded with too many things and distracted by so much busyness.

As an artist I've never been happy merely communicating the problems; I don't want to make more images that tell the world about the atrocities of war; I don't want to do a durational performance that points out the destruction of the biosphere; I don't want to make art *about* issues, but *in* them, *with* them. I want an art that is immediate⁴¹, that is embedded in the issues themselves. An art that directly intervenes and attempts to transform the problem not illustrate it. I don't want to represent things but to change them.

The trouble was most people called that – Direct action⁴², something activists do. To be honest I never cared whether it was called art *or* activism. As far as I was concerned Art was a concept that most non-western cultures didn't even have, and something that

embodied and expressed across the earth". See the DVD by Spanish artist/activist Marcelo Expósito - Radical Imagination (Carnivals of Resistance) and Notes from Nowhere, We are Everywhere: the irresistible rise of global anticapitalism.(see note 29)

39 Another audacious act of resistance created while I was working with Reclaim the Streets was the Mayday 2000 guerrilla gardening action which several thousand people illegally planting a vegetable garden in front of the houses of Parliament. Despite the (Magritte inspired) publicity which claimed "This is not a protest" and described the action as the creation of practical alternatives to urban food production, it was to be the metropolitan police's largest mobilisation of forces since the war and the Evening Standard headline on the eve announced "Army on standby for Mayday riot". During the event an unknown person climbed onto a statue of Winston Churchill and crowned it with a strip of turf, transforming the British symbol of authority into rowdy punk sporting a green Mohican. An establishment commentator suggested that this iconoclastic act should have received the Turner prize - see Wilson, Peter Lamborn, and Bill Weinberg, ed. *Avant Gardening: Ecological Struggle in the City and the World*. Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 1999.

40 Buddhist monk and practitioner of what has been termed Engaged Buddhism, Thich Nhat Hanh writes "When we do not trouble ourselves about whether or not something is a work of art, if we just act in each moment with composure and mindfulness, each minute of our life is a work of art." See his (1991) *Peace is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*, Rider, London.

41 All experience is mediated to some degree, whether through language, perception or our senses, but imagining an art practice that attempts to have the least mediation possible is what Hakim Bey has done with his concept of Immediatism. Bey calls for a practice which is deeply reciprocal, that has no border between performer and spectators, that utilises the imagination and bodies of all involved and that challenges the alienation of capitalist culture. Exploring societies where the shaman is not the specialist of the imagination but where everyone is a special sort of shaman, a kind of "democratic shamanism," he cites parties where odours are swapped, potlatch feasts, quilting bees, orgies and games as examples of Immediatism. See Bey, Hakim. *Immediatism: Essays* by Hakim Bey. San Francisco & Edinburgh: AK Press. 1994.

42 For a manual of direct action, packed with instructions and accounts of first hand experiences, ranging from building giant inflatable tents to hold rebel circuses in, to how to sabotage your workplace, getting food from skips and shoplift without being caught to managing non monogamous relationships, making smoke bombs to embedding permanent messages into road tarmac. See the 624 page masterpiece of contemporary propaganda – *Recipes for Disaster: An Anarchist Cookbook*. (2006) Crimethink, Atlanta.

separated creativity⁴³ from everyday life. I was much more at home with the Balinese concept that art was simply doing everything in the best possible way, that it was a question of paying absolute attention to the world and to ones responses to it.

The term activist was equally problematic, it makes people who work on social change issues into experts, separating them from the rest of society. Activist become specialists in rebellion and the transformation of life and yet so often they live in a bubble very different from the lives of so called “ordinary” people. Taking on the identity of the activist often assumes other people aren’t doing anything to change their lives and that its our responsibility as “The activist” to act on their behalf.

While Activists have the monopoly on social transformation, artists have the monopoly on creativity, both roles continue the unhealthy division of labour and specialism⁴⁴ that our culture requires to separate people from each other and to stop us being self reliant.

I’m acutely aware that the world of art desperately lacks genuine social engagement and the world of politics lacks creativity and yet I try not to get stuck in either of them. I try to find a path in the very middle: the knife edge between the two, the space in between, neither one - nor the other - but both. I try to reside in that most powerful place on earth: no man’s land, the land where the unexpected *always* happens.

The best art is always found in the most unexpected places. “Art loves to be incognito,” wrote the painter Dubuffet “its best moments are when it forgets what it is called.” Making art that was invisible as art⁴⁵, was important for me. As a young live artists I was sick of doing performances in public spaces where I would inevitably end up talking with audiences about definitions of art and why the weird things I was doing in public was in

43 Poet, philosopher and farmer Wendell Berry writes beautifully about reuniting art and everyday life within the context of ecological collapse: “Though people have not progressed beyond the need to eat food and drink water and wear clothes and live in houses, most people have progressed beyond the domestic arts ... by which those needful things are produced and conserved. In fact the comparative few who still practice that necessary husbandry and wifery often are inclined to apologise for doing so, having been carefully taught in our education system that those acts are degrading and unworthy of peoples talents. Educated minds, in the modern era, are unlikely to know anything about food and drink, clothing and shelter. In merely taking these things for granted, the modern educated mind reveals itself also to be as superstitious a minds as ever has existed in the world. What could be more superstitious than the idea that money can bring forth food.” See Berry, Wendell, (2005) *The Way of Ignorance: and other essays*, Shoemaker & Hoard, Washington DC.

44 Specialists are people who know more and more about less and less, until they almost know nothing. Most forms of radical practices are “post disciplinary” rejecting all fixed disciples. “Interdisciplinary says the more disciplines the better, but postdisciplinary”, writes cultural theorist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett “says, “Forget them.” Who needs them? Take a problem and go anywhere you need for the material.” See the wonderful series of dialogues, including with Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, that explore the shifting site of the aesthetic in Gablik, Suzi. *Conversations before the End of Time: Dialogues on Art, Life and Spiritual Renewal*. London: Thames & Hudson. 1995.

45 The Situationists believed that the realization of art was only possible through its suppression. For a whirlwind tour that links the history of Dada, Situationism and Punk via the Paris commune, medieval religious sects, and more, see Marcus, Greil. *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of The Twentieth Century*. London: Picador. 1989.

fact art. I didn't care what it was called, what I cared about was what it *did*⁴⁶. Was it successfully transforming society?

I soon realised that by making the art “incognito”, the work could touch people more. They didn't bring all their baggage and expectations of what art should do or be, and where it should be found. They became more open to the experience itself. For a while my work would use fronts⁴⁷; such as a fake urban development agency, to promote the unearthing of a buried river⁴⁸, or a spoof sex shop and peepshow to ask questions about men's use of pornography⁴⁹. But it wasn't enough just for the art to be incognito, the label artists should go as well, and so I eventually dissolved⁵⁰ into social movements and applied creativity directly to acts of resistance – collective events, unsigned and un-attributed to artists. An action would be planned like any performance piece, crowd movements choreographed like dance, protest strategies would be scrutinised with the detail of design, propaganda would be as beautiful and enlightening as possible. Elegance, detail and crafting were essential.

I began to realise that producing forms that were difficult to categorise was just as important in the context of activism. So I started making the problematic stereotypes of “political activism” incognito too; collectively developing protests that were more akin to free parties than boring marches⁵¹, bringing out radical publications that looked (on first

46 To many it is the very uselessness of art which gives it its status. In 1990 Artists Mel Chin's worked with biochemist Rufus Chaney developing sculptural experiments with plant species that can be planted on toxic waste sites to clean up the contamination. The National Endowment for the Arts, decided that the work was “not art” and temporarily removed its funding from the project. For Chin, the aesthetic of the work was seeing the return of healthy decontaminated soil at the end of the project. See - Matilisky, Barbara C, *Fragile Ecologies: Contemporary Artists' Interpretations and Solutions*, Queens Museum of Art/Rizzoli, New York, 1992. Another artist to seek solutions is Mierle Laderman Ukele's, who works with the unglamorous yet environmentally crucial issue of urban waste. For over twenty years she worked “in –residence” with the New York waste department, setting up a series of performances, rituals and installations that provided poetic yet pragmatic answers to the problem of managing the mountains of rubbish from a megapolis. She describes her activity as Maintenance art, “unless we maintain, “ she says, “we can't continue”. See more on her in Gablik (see note 30) and Burnham, Linda Frye, and Steven Durland, eds. *The Citizen Artist: 20 Years in the Public Arena: An Anthology from High Performance Magazine 1978-98*. Gardiner NY: Critical Press, 1998. ref:1998 243

47 Spoofs and pranks have become a key tactic for many art activists and culture jammers. For an overview of artists using the genre, see Juno, Andrea, and J. G. Ballard. *Pranks!* San Francisco: Re/Search Publishing, 1987.

48 For documentation of this project “The Effra Redevelopment Agency” see J Kastner and B Wallis – (see note 18)

49 For more on this work that mixed performance, video installations, therapy, media interventions (including a frightening appearances on Richard and Judy!) see the catalogue Jordan, John “Consuming Desire”, *Camerawork*, London, 1999.

50 Critic Grant Kestler in his essay “Dialogical Aesthetics: A critical framework for Littoral Art” redefines the artist as “collaborator in dialogue rather than expressive agent”. See *Variant Magazine – Volume 2 number 9, special supplement*.

51 The direct action group Reclaim the Streets (RTS) , which I worked with (1995 – 2000) wanted to get away from a traditional confrontational protest situation and prefigure our imagined world in the moment of protest itself. We developed the street party, to reclaim public space from the motor car and consumerism and inject pleasure into political action. It involved bringing sound systems and thousands of dancers illegally into urban streets. One of RTS's infamous moments took place while 10,000 dancing people occupied London's m41 motorway, hidden under giant carnival figures we dug up the motorway with jackhammers to plant trees. The street party was to prove an idea which spread to global proportions by the end of the 90's. For more see Duncombe (see note 20) and McKay, George (ed.), *DIY Culture: Party and Protest in Nineties Britain*, London & New York: Verso, 1998.

glance) like actual daily newspapers, being involved in riots that resembled carnivals⁵², designing actions that imitated the corporate PR campaigns of the very company targeted⁵³, training demonstrators to behave like circus clowns rather than dangerous anarchists. “Always do what’s least expected of you and always expect the unexpected” became my shapeshifter’s creed.

It was the summer of 2000. I was about to go to Prague, to help organise the actions to disrupt the annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). I had just read how the “pope” of surrealism, Andre Breton⁵⁴, had taken the works of Charles Fourier⁵⁵,

52 Reinventing tactics of resistance has become a central preoccupation for the global movement of movements. How do we make rebellion enjoyable, effective and irresistible? Who wants the tedium of traditional demonstrations and protests – the ritual marches from point A to B, the permits and police escorts, the staged acts of civil disobedience, the verbose rallies and dull speeches by leaders? Instead, why not use a form of rebellion that embody the movements’ principles of diversity, creativity, decentralization, horizontality, and direct action? These principles can be found at the heart of an ancient form of cultural expression, the carnival. Throughout history carnival has been a time for inverting the social order, where the village fool dresses as the king and the king waits on the pauper, where men and women wear each others’ clothing and perform each others’ roles. This inversion exposes the power structures and illuminates the processes of maintaining hierarchies – seen from a new angle, the foundations of authority are shaken up and flipped around. The unpredictability of carnival with its total subservience to spontaneity, where any individual can shape her environment and transform herself into another being for an hour or a day, ruptures what we perceive to be reality. It creates a new world by subverting all stereotypes, daring imaginations to expand their limits, turning the present world upside down, if only for a moment. See Richard Schechner’s essay “The Street is the Stage” for more on moments when rebellion and carnival collide in Cohen-Cruz, Jan ed. *Radical Street Performance: an international anthology*, London and New York: Routledge. 1998 ref:P0360

53 Joseph Beuys never divorced his role of teacher from that of artist and activist. Teaching was a way for him to create open forums to debate his expanded notion of art. Even social movements (The German Student Party) were founded during his charismatic classes. I have tried to put teaching at the core of my practice, for me the point of radical pedagogy is not to tell students how to change the world, but to show them that the world we assume to be static and sacred is in fact fluid and malleable. This prank www.firstfreebus.co.uk was the result of a four month course I facilitated with University Drama students in 2006.

54 Surrealism is perhaps the most popularly known of the avant-gardes, ask any western school kid and they will probably be able point you to a surrealist paintings. No doubt it will be by the great betrayer of surrealism, Salvadore Dali, kicked out of the movement and nick named “Avida Dollars” (an anagram of his name) meaning “greedy for dollars”. By the 1930’s he had sold out to “café society,” designing for corporations, painting ambassadors, supporting General Franco and erotically attracted to Hitler. All of which went against everything the surrealists who were “determined to make a revolution” believed in. “Rebellion is its own justification, completely independent of the chance it has to modify the state of affairs that gives rise to it. It’s a spark in the wind, but a spark in search of a powder keg” wrote founder Andre Breton. Dedicated to creating radical social change, the surrealists even set off a little known revolution. It took place in Haiti in 1946 following a lecture tour there by Breton and it toppled the repressive government. Now their radical political actions have been all but wiped out by the flood of benign coffee table books. Yet in the 1920’s and 30’s it was taken for granted that artists should engage in social change, Expressionists, Dadaists and Futurists all wanted to radically transform society. Diluted by a rewriting of history and subject to commodification by the art market they must all be spinning wildly in their graves. See Lewis, Helena. *Dada Turns Red: The Politics of Surrealism*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 1990.

55 Charles Fourier’s extraordinary imagination anticipated many things, Freud’s psychoanalysis, climate change, the radical pedagogy of A.S Neil, the non specialised working community of Marx and Engels, the affinity groups of the direct action movements and the digging of the Suez and Panama canal. At the heart of his vision of a harmonious community were human passions. All evil was the consequence of repression and social peace could therefore only be achieved if society was built around the liberation and utilisation of passions. We all have attractions towards particular people and types of activities,

the prolific 18th century Utopian with him on a long train journey across Europe. Drawn to Fourier's complex ideal community with its liberation of passions⁵⁶, its joyful feasts, erotic freedom and non-compulsary playful work, I decided my train journey to Prague would be an opportunity to finally read his work. I spent the next few days trawling the bookshops of London. No one had anything by or about him. Disappointed, I got on the train without a Utopian volume at my side.

Many hours and borders later, I arrive in Prague. It was late at night, my friends had told me to meet them in a hip internet café in the centre of the city. The café had a tiny one room bookshop annex, unable to resist the joy of browsing I took a look. As I entered the dimly lit space I sensed something strange, a kind of 'I've been here before' sensation, a peculiar recognition of something familiar. I moved towards the shelves, eyes straining to see the book titles in the low light. My first surprise was that most of them were in English, and then it slowly dawned on me. This bookshop was like a mirror of my own bookshelves at home, all my favourite books were there: Situationists, Dada, Abbey Hoffman, tomes about protesters, pranksters and rebel poets everywhere. It was as if someone had transported all my books to this tiny room in the back streets of this magical city of alchemists and fairy tales. Then I saw a book that I didn't recognise, I reached up to get it from the high shelf, it was a big chunky grey volume, the title on its thick spine read: Charles Fourier: The visionary and his world.

The library angels had returned.

Fourier's Utopia was managed around these individual and collective passions. His vision however, was not of a chaotic orgy of free love and riotous abandon. He was an obsessive orderer, his work room was filled with pots of flowers, all regimented by colour or species, most of his work involved devising meticulously intricate systems of classification for matching different peoples passions so that they could live and work in harmony together. see Beecher, Jonathan, Charles Fourier: The Visionary and His World, University of California Press, 1986.

⁵⁶ I don't remember who wrote this, or where, or which library or bookshop I read it in – but it seems fitting words to end these footnotes that have taken us step by step across a world of politics and passions – "Don't ask me what to do to change the world. Ask yourself what makes you feel alive, because the world needs more people who feel alive."