Marcel Allen

From Spectacle to Socially Engaged Art Practice:
Art as potential disruptor and transformer of engagement with the spectacle

An exegesis submitted to the Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Creative Technologies

July 2015

For more information about projects check

www.cargocollective.com/renandmars

Or get in contact directly

marcelallen@yahoo.co.nz

Contents:

Attestation of Authorship

"I herby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning."

July 2015

Marcel Allen

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all my collaborators and conspirators, especially Renee Warner for all the inspiration and insights (and getting things done).

Thanks to all the Colab staff and students who helped me directly or indirectly with this process and journey. In particular, Harry Silver whom without I may not have been introduced to Colab and of course James Charlton for all his guidance, encouragement and critique that has helped shape this research project.

I would also like to thank my fiancé Alex and friends and family who have supported me in the ups and downs.

Arohanui tonu

'*A revolt against the spectacle*', wrote the Situationists, '*calls everything into question because it is a human protest against a dehumanized life*'. To assault the spectacle is to bring truths to light, to see things as they really are.

Tom Vague quoting Situationist International, 'Decline and Fall of the Spectacle-Commodity Economy' in the introduction to Society of the Spectacle

Abstract

This research project looks at the potential of public art to engage and transform our individual and collective understandings of dominant contemporary socio-political concepts, perspectives and ideology. It analyses tactics and strategies from other arts practices engaged in social practice, explicitly or implicitly and incorporates them into the research projects methodology of art practice. The works developed use primarily interactive video installations to allude to site specific, contextually based issues. They re-imagine the space and provoke participants to infer and also create their own meaning, and thus aim to spark active as well as reflective engagement with the ideas and themes of the specific works. The work is a lens to not only examine issues of social hierarchies, hegemonic ideology and dominant world-views, but to provoke audience response and action.

To this end Guy Debord's concepts of spectacle, detournement and recuperation serve as a tool for analysing how various arts practices including that of this research project operate and address the dominant social, cultural and the economic views via aesthetic and ethico-political means. It looks at the possibilities of aesthetic detournement of spectacular life and the extent that the detourne resists recuperation, or re-appropriation by the dominant order of things. It aims to effectively disrupt the spectacle and resist being consumed back into the spectacular order. It is a presentation and representation of the unearthing of concealed truths, to provoke discussion and mindfulness of the structures of the spectacle, in as much as the spectacle can be viewed as propaganda for the dominant hegemony of meaning. The tensions and relationship between spectacle and social practice art, aesthetics and ethics are investigated through theory, practice and reflection.

Research Aim and Questions

Through the researchers own art practice the question of how art practice might utilise the spectacle in terms of its detournement of the representational by holding it in tension with concepts of social practice and the experiential, not to perpetuate the commodification of culture, but to create a more deeply, socially engaged arts platform for change is explored.

Can art transcend its public perception as an aesthetic subject in order to transform social, cultural and political norms via a propositional mode of address? As far as art is a symbolic cultural order, how does it transform our understanding of its symbols and extend our understanding of its particular subject matter? How can it thus critique its own representational understandings whilst engaging participants in a new way with its subject matter?

Definitions

Spectacle:

1. In Societies where modern conditions of production prevail, all of life presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles. Everything that was directly lived has moved away into a representation. (Debord, 1967, pg.72)
4. The Spectacle is not a collection of images, but a social relation among people, mediated by images. (Debord, 1967, pg.73)

Detournement:

"Detournement is the practice of taking an already-existing expression and re-presenting it to change its meaning. Relatively straightforward examples of detournement include ad-busting and subvertising, billboard liberation and spoof reproductions." (Debord, 1967, pg. 51)

"Where recuperation makes radical things benign, detournement makes benign or even reactionary things radical; detournement exacerbates the contradictions that the spectacle attempts to smooth over. 'Detournement', Debord writes, 'is the flexible language of anti-ideology'." (Debord, 1967, pg. 52)

Representation:

"The Society of the Spectacle is a book about representation: representation as a philosophical dilemma dating back to Plato; representation as the root function of the media; political representation and representatives; and, most importantly, the control of representations as the spectacle's mechanism of power. More specifically, it is a book about the alienating effects of representation." (Debord, 1967, pg. 42)

We increasingly interact with representations of the world, rather than the world itself. Debord claims that everything has become representation. Whether this is true or not, it is important to critically think about what is being represented and in whose interest.

Recuperation:

"One of the Situationist International's key concepts was that of recuperation, the process through which the spectacle can hollow-out any gesture of resistance, re-represent it, and divest it of its radical content. The recuperated gesture can then circulate harmlessly in the spectacle to placate or distract any would-be antagonists. The spectacle thrives through reducing real opposition to the image of opposition, repackaged as an exchangeable commodity." (Debord, 1967, pg.45)

Social Practice:

'Social Practice' is one term from many used to describe an array of art practices that are often described as relational, participatory, dialogical, collaborative, cooperative, pedagogical and often political. The plethora of terms for these practices is indicative of the diversity of work and the difficulties in creating generalized, decontextualized terms for them. What these practices have in common, can be potentially illuminated by Nicolas Bourriaud's assertion that "*relational* art (is) (an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space)" (Bourriaud, 2002, pg. 14) They operate to varying degrees in the public, away from the traditional institutions of galleries and museums and with the focus of the work on social relations rather than the art object.

Social practice is used as a term in this research, not to prioritise a particular perspective of these practices but for the same reasons Larne Ahrms Bogarty writes that " 'social practice' rather than any of the other terms used for this type of work (…) is the least loaded and does not suffer from being attached to a particular scholar or camp within the debate." (Bogarty, 2014) This essay focuses on the commonalities of discussions by critics and scholars such as Claire Bishop and her discussion of Participatory Art, Grant Kester and Dialogical and Collaborative Art and Nato Thompson's discussions of Socially Engaged Art.

Theoretical Context

Aesthetics and ethics

Central to many discussions of social practice art is the binary of aesthetics and ethics. A discussion that can be traced back through Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* to Guy Debord's more political discussion of *The Society of the Spectacle* and its mechanisms. "More significant is the tendency for advocates of socially collaborative art to view the aesthetic as (at best) merely visual and (at worst) an elitist realm of unbridled seduction complicit with spectacle." (Bishop, 2012 loc. 551) Aesthetics in social practice has taken on a negative connotation and is often viewed as tied in with the spectacle and it's concealment of the mediation of social relations through appearances and representations as discussed by Guy Debord. Aestheticisation is viewed as complicit with the spectacle that Debord speaks of as a commodification of culture, or reducing things to a pleasing or digestible appearance for consumption.

Rather than focusing on the aesthetics of social practice art as a negation of spectacle, what is potentially more fertile is to look at how new aesthetics are formed in relation to the spectacle, in order to disrupt and subvert it to reveal rather than conceal certain truths and attempt a less superficial engagement. Whether this is done through relational, participatory or collaborative aesthetics, what is often common to all is the emphasis on intervening or disrupting the alienation and separation of society as perpetuated by the spectacle. This is what Debord refers to as detournement of the spectacle, a discursion or intervention in dominant views of the political, social, cultural or environmental in order to unconceal the spectacle's machinations and bring about a new way of understanding and of being. This idea of healing the social bond then rests in the tension between effecting tangible change and being recuperated as Debord calls it, by the spectacle through the commodification of the culture of this practice. Recuperation becomes the apparatus by which the spectacle allows for resistance and dissensus to the hegemonic order, by re-appropriating, diluting or even inverting dissensus. An example would be the rhetoric of revolution, used by marketing and public relations to sell new products and commodities or commodifying alternative ways of living as 'lifestyles' and presenting the other as another choice of the 'free market'. These concepts of spectacle, detournement and recuperation will be looked at more in-depth, in relation to social practice art examples later.

This tendency away from traditional aesthetics towards more relational concerns then brings us to the ethical dimension of working with people as the form of the work. Claire Bishop discusses Jacques Rancière's concept of the ethical turn of politics and aesthetics, in relation to social practice art to address the impetus of this field of art making of the last 20 years to prioritise ethical considerations over aesthetic ones. If we look specifically at Bishop's critique of Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics, what she is critical of is how Bourriaud accentuates the ethical dimension of inclusivity and conviviality amongst participants and that the 'form' of the art is more often described than critiqued. This indicates the difficulty in

evaluating and comparing these kinds of works, but this is not something particular to relational or socially engaged art. It is as old as the sentiment 'beauty is in the eye of the beholder'. What this indicates about this kind of art making is a shift towards affecting and effecting change in the world. Not just art in to life, but the ethic of the art of change for the better.

This research thus looks at the tensions of aesthetics of form and ethics of representation and efficacy of social practice, rather than privileging or negating one over the other, in its analysis of strategies and tactics that have effected the research's arts practice outputs.

"It is in the nature of this practice that many projects exist on the boundaries of art and some adjacent domain of cultural or social production."(Kester, 2015) Grant Kester in the inaugural editorial of *Field* Journal introduces the blurring of boundaries of social practice art with other practices, that is indicative of this tension of aesthetics and ethics or efficacy and the status of social practice as art or some adjacent domain. He goes on to say, "We are less concerned here with what has become a largely sterile set of debates about the status of this work as "art," than with determining, through the close investigation of specific projects, the ways in which power and resistance operate through a manifold of aesthetic, discursive, inter-subjective and institutional factors."(Kester, 2015)

Kester identifies the "crude opposition between ethics and aesthetics or singular and collective authorship that has characterized recent critical dialogue" as problematic and instead advocates for "a sustained and immersive engagement with site, process and practice that is able to move fluidly from the power dynamics encoded in the physical proximity of individual bodies to the macro-political framing of local or situational gestures in the context of global neo-liberalism." (Kester, 2015) What is suggested is that these kinds of works cannot be unpacked merely through a critique of aesthetics or ethics of the representational forms, but through a sort of ethnographic study of the work and methodology.

Nato Thompson suggests "focusing on methodologies is also an attempt to shift the conversation away from the arts' typical lens of analysis: aesthetics. This is not to say that the visual holds no place in this work, but instead this approach emphasizes the designated forms produced for impact. By focusing on how a work approaches the social, as opposed to simply what it looks like, we can better calibrate a language to unpack its numerous engagements." (Thompson, 2012, pg.22)

For works that take as their artistic form the social relations of a created situation, it seems appropriate to focus on methodology and process as a way to evaluate the work. This is one of the key reasons this research paper focuses on the discussion of arts projects that have been experienced by the researcher, not only read about in critique. To understand the new relational forms of socially engaged arts practices, it is crucial to experience the work and not just its representations.

The Spectacle and Social Practice

The spectacle, within art circles has become synonymous with the commodification of culture and viewed as concealing the ideology behind such spectacles. In this view, the public consumes such representations without much thought due to lack of time, education or inclination to question the hegemonic forces of what is being represented. The spectacle of representations stands in for the presentation and engagement of culture and the world of appearances are taken at face value. How then can the spectacle reveal rather than conceal, cultural, political and societal issues and allow publics to openly engage with these issues and claim some form of agency?

One way in which artists have attempted to do this is to remove all representation from the work, to constrain it to first hand experience of the real time events. Examples of this are Tino Seghal's 'Constructed Situations' or the spectacle of Flash Mobs. Of course flash mob performances are often documented these days and go viral on the internet and even Tino Seghal cannot control how those who participate in his work represent his practice.

The presentation of an artistic situation or process and its re-presentation can lead to the recuperation of resistance to the spectacle and reinforce the dominant ideology rather than question it and pose an alternative. Claire bishop discusses the need for the artwork to negotiate the tension between the symbolic, contemplative elements and the active process of participation. "This new proximity between spectacle and participation underlines the necessity of sustaining a tension between artistic and social critiques. The most striking projects that constitute the history of participatory art unseat all the polarities on which this discourse is founded (individual/collective, author/spectator, active/passive, real life/art)" (Bishop, 2012, loc. 5447)

It is not that an artwork can only be either the artistic spectacle of representation or the presentation of the social, through practice, but social practice art that spans both challenges the boundaries of artistic and social critique. "The aesthetic regime is constitutively contradictory, shuttling between autonomy and heteronomy […] in art, theatre and education alike, there needs to be a mediating object that stands between the idea of the artist and the feeling and interpretation of the spectator: 'This spectacle is a third term, to which the other two can refer, but which prevents any kind of "equal" or "undistorted" transmission. It is a mediation between them, and that mediation of a third term is crucial in the process of intellectual emancipation. […] The same thing that links them must also separate them." For Bishop the artistic framework and the social framework of critique are "not to be reconciled, but sustained in continual tension." (Bishop, 2012, loc. 5453)

Propositional and Invitational modes in art and adjacent practices

As a strategy for making art politically, the research project has considered Ryan Reynolds' concept of propositional development, which has evolved specifically in the context of adaptive urbanism in the rebuild of post-quake Christchurch. Ryan Reynolds is Co-founder and Chair of the Gap Filler Trust, "a charitable initiative combining architecture, design and performance to activate vacant city sites with temporary creative projects." (Bennett, Dann, Johnson, Reynolds (eds.), 2014, pg. 167) What is interesting is the way the projects are developed through a perceived lack, a low-budget, low-risk experiment and a feedback loop that allows the public to adapt, develop and take ownership of the particular project or enterprise. "This propositional mode, we now believe, is well suited to generating public support for innovation. […] consultation, comes from monitoring how the public uses, embraces, ignores or rejects the project. If a project 'fails', not much time and money is 'lost', and it provides useful learning for future projects. If a project 'succeeds', it can last longer, or have iterative additions. (Bennett, Dann, Johnson, Reynolds (eds.), 2014, pg. 169)

These projects create a space for innovative city building through experimentation. They often detourne the spectacle of consumer capitalism usually associated with a central business district, in order to allow sociability and other forms of being that resist commodification. In this way, they attempt to infiltrate the commercial development of the city by advocating agency of its citizens. It also challenges perceptions of public art, in both a symbolic and practical way. This propositional and invitational mode of art making in New Zealand has attempted to be incorporated in to the tactics and strategies of the practical outputs of the research project and to what extent interactive technologies can augment and redefine these propositional and invitational modes of engagement and exchange in public art.

Background:

Past practice informing research trajectory

The research looked to develop the public, site-specific video installations to date and push them in to a more politicised sphere. To this end, arts practices that explore the political without being subsumed by it were investigated. It would be important that the tactics and strategies allow the art practice to become more politicised without losing the criticality and distance of the art lens.

It started with an intention to define a purpose for the arts practice beyond what had been achieved to date. To engage people in a way that could effect social change through playful actions. Could interactive technologies, be used to extend the previous video projection work, in order to spark debate and engagement with socio-political issues and contribute to a shift in mindset?

The formulation of the research trajectory came when delivering a presentation to Golan Levin in a Colab master class where two different trajectories were described for the potential research. One was the soft form of participatory or community art, that looks to induce conviviality and positivism and the other is the more hard form of disruption, antagonism and intervention that looks to shake up the public to break them out of the spell they are under. Could these two impetuses be combined? Golan Levin suggested these two strands were not reconcilable and there was no artistic precedent for how it might be done. This challenge catalyzed the aim of the project to explore how to use the awe of a spectacular form with the disruption of a more activist one. To see if a pleasing version of visual aesthetics could be married with a sensibility that was critical and opened out an exploration of the work, what it represents and how this understanding of representation came to be.
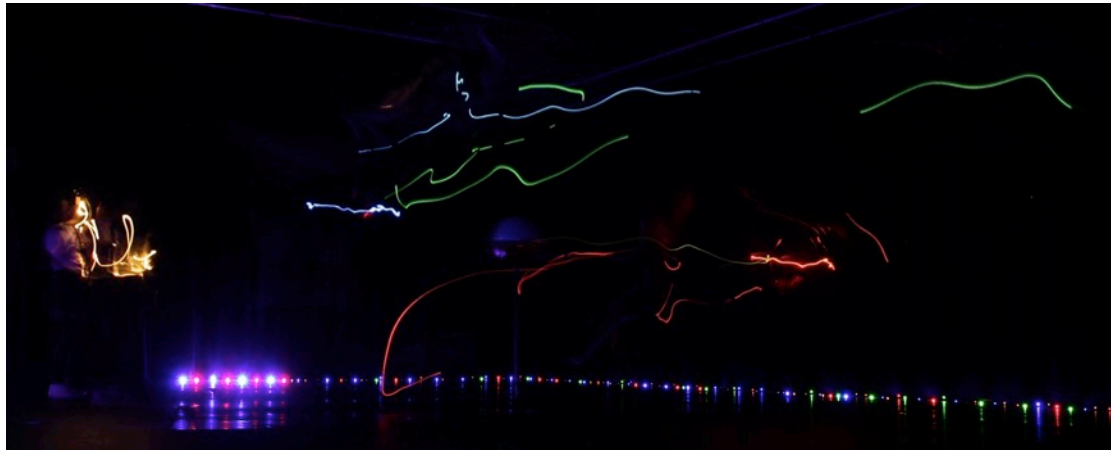
The House of Representatives, Marcel Allen, exploratory work, Colab, AUT 2014

The House of Representatives

The first work that started to explore these ideas was *The House of Representatives 2014,* which looked at how political representation in New Zealand through MMP presented political parties as representing specific spheres of governance of the economic, social and environmental spheres. It sought to engage people with how a more collaborative form of politics might take the best insights of each party to form a more holistic approach to governance. It used fish shaped blimps with search lights of a specific colour associated with the National, Labour and Green Parties [1] to explore a space littered with symbols representing the economic, social and environmental perspectives. Each representative blimp could only illuminate the symbol most strongly associated with it. In order to see all the symbols, participants had to play with all the 'political representatives' in order to gain a complete picture of the symbolic order. After presenting the piece, it became apparent more work would need to be done in order to make explicit the idea of how the Mixed Member Parliamentary model could be a more collaborative form of governance. Participants did not often perceive the importance of seeing all perspectives in order to gain the complete picture both practically and as a metaphor.

---

[1] National is associated with blue, Labour with red and Green with green. Appropriate for representing with the RGB spectrum of light.

Arohanui Tonu, Marcel Allen and Renee Warner, Art in the Dark 2013, Western Park Ponsonby Auckland

A Walk in the Park After Dark

Site specificity and context has always been key to the practice. Through events such as Art in the Dark in Western Park in Auckland, it has over a number of years[2] explored how to re-imagine public space. It's a kind of visioning project for community building through the transformation of public space. The majority of works to date have been in parks at nighttime. They sought to transform what Guy Debord called psycho-geography norms, through a detournement of the habitual ways of being.

Four works have been created for Art in the Dark so far. *Day For Night, 2011* re-imagined a playground as a safe space that could accommodate playful nighttime experiences in a location that is usually seen as dangerous at night. *Plant the Seed, 2012* looked at public green space as potential spaces for food production and community building. *Arohanui Tonu, 2013* created a space for multi-cultural engagement and *Waiatarau, 2014* looked at the watery history and potential futures of the wider Freemans Bay area.

The intent for *Waiatarau,* was to push it into the research space of spectacle and activism. Whilst not being overtly political, it was an artistic gesture that attempted to symbolically allude to the politics of climate change and the consequences of our actions. By being able to wade in the watery light, it attempted to allude to simultaneously the passed, present and future. The audience could feel their presence in the alternate reality of the space, an augmentation alluding to other possibilities, attempting to fragment the smooth façade of the spectacle.

---

[2] From 2011 to 2014 collaborative video installations have been created with Renee Warner and others, for Art in the Dark, Splore and the Auckland Arts Festival
See: cargocollective.com/renandmars

Artistic Context:

New Zealand Aotearoa contemporary art works of relevance to the research process and practice

The ideas and methodologies of the research project have been affected and influenced through the experience of these arts projects during the research projects development. They have given insight and inspiration, as well as a sense of context for the development of the arts practice.

This Home Is Occupied, May-July 2014 was one of the works encountered after starting the Masters project by Sukiko Sugawa. Sugawa was the St Paul St 2014 Research Fellow at AUT and had been working with the Tamaki Housing Group, students and community in Glen Innes who were fighting forced evictions from state housing. *This Home Is Occupied*, is of interest to the research because of its political nature and the problematic way the content is privileged over the form. The aesthetics of representation are minimal in fitting with a common trope of social practice attempting not to spectacularise or aestheticise the project. In fact Sugawa herself says she has difficulty with the art label. This leaves her in a precarious position, but not one uncommon in such social practices, that of detournement of the art label and the resistance to recuperation by the spectacle, an interesting tactic to sideline the discussion of aesthetics. Despite this we are still left wondering if the work is it too aestheticised or not artistic enough in form.

It elicits a response to the ethical and utilitarian form of it but not necessarily to the art form itself. The actual form of the exhibition (video documentation, archival film, history, posters etc.) represents not so much the process as much as aestheticisation of protest and social housing history by presenting it inside the gallery walls, like another piece of history in the museum. Although it is clear from the long history presented, that social housing is an issue that is still unfurling. The current residents and protestors from Glen Innes are represented in video, and were also in attendance at the opening. What seems to be the most interesting part of the project, the process in getting to know the community and understand the issue from an embedded point of view, always seems illusory. Instead we are left somewhere between archival exhibit and aestheticized activism. It is hard to gain access to the relational aesthetic of the work, as it seems as mostly an impression of the background process and as an exhibition it seems to focus on the documentation and the historical representation. Again this points to the difficulty of reading these kinds of works without having had an embedded point of view of the methodology of the work and only limited experiential contact through the spectacle of its representation. This work and Sugawa's practice speak to the difficulty of establishing a practice, balanced precariously between art, politics, entertainment and sociability.

A collective of artists that also move in this terrain of art, politics, entertainment and sociability is D.A.N.C.E. Art Club. For the show *Welcome,* 2014 at Artspace, curated by D.A.N.C.E. Art club member Ahilapalapa Rands, their *Guinness World Record Attempt* by Linda T, was a work that engages with aspects of the social and the participatory. It was literally a Guinness world record attempt for longest DJ set in a public space that required the constant presence of dance participants. The work activated the gallery of Artspace 24/7 and saw an extended audience participate in the transformation of the institute into a more welcoming and socially inclusive space beyond the usual Artspace audience. The performance and surrounding situation explores the aestheticisation of the real and problematises the locus of an artistic intervention or interpretation. The fact that it is in a public art gallery frames it as art but beyond this what is interesting is how it formed new social relations and to what extent these were explored. It's utility or usefulness is its extension of the institute of a public art gallery and perhaps its artistic stamp is its problematising of art as entertainment. On some levels it conceals the spectacle of fame and popularity and on others it seems to attempt to reveal aspects of this, possibly through the framing of it in a public art gallery space that is usually a place of reflection and contemplation rather than action.

Looking at what artist Tania Bruguera calls the two phases of art can illuminate this notion of usefulness and action. She is a Cuban artist discussed in the realm of social practice by Bishop, Kester, Finkelpearl, Thompson and others. "Art can have two phases: the one where you see something and show it to other people and the one where, after that collective recognition, you do something with it, you apply it. I'm having a lot of problems right now with contemporary art because almost everything stops with that that first phase, which could be identified as research. We should go with a different model of doing art, a model that integrates human activity and everyday life in a different way. For me that is to create art that works simultaneously in different dimensions, including a useful dimension that does not eliminate the intellectual, contemplative one. Why do you have to have a split between thinking and doing?" (Finkelpearl, 2013, loc. 3299)

CityUps event at the Festival of Transitional Architecture, 24-27 October 2014, Christchurch CBD

The Festival of Transitional Architecture in 2014, was the third annual festival in post-quake Christchurch central business district that "celebrates collective and creative city-making […] with a diverse, engaging programme of creative urban renewal and a major large-scale 'live architecture' event." (FESTA 2014 programme) This event displayed an array of tactics and strategies exploring the tensions of aesthetics, ethics and politics. Its critique also sheds some light on the tensions and relationship between spectacle and social practice art.

The night of CityUps was a re-imagining of the leveled central business district at the main intersection of Lichfield, Manchester and High Street. It was taken over with large-scale installations built on scaffolds designed by a myriad of students, exploring the future of Christchurch in the present tense. With music, dancing and games in the streets it had a mix of festival and carnival about it, with markets, street food and activities. It created an environment to spark people's imaginations about how the city could be. The social bond was nurtured and people saw the city in a way they never had, physically, socially and culturally. The loss from the earthquakes and the adversity of living in post-quake Christchurch has created a necessity and urgency to new ways of thinking and action that both circumnavigate bureaucracy and hope to influence it.

There was detournement of the city as a public playground and temporary transformation of the city as it attempted to collectively imagine a new future. There was a blurring of the private and public space, questioning how we define such spaces. The detournement of private property and conventional development sought not only to resist the dictatorial approach of government and capital, but also to attempt its infiltration by the recuperation of such a detourne. It seems an attempt to influence the dominant ideology of capitalist development into something that is more in service of the public.

18

Part of the change that was showcased at FESTA was various projects facilitated by Gap Filler. "Gap Filler is a creative urban regeneration initiative that generates a wide range of temporary projects, events, installations and amenities in the city."(Gap Filler website) These initiatives range from a performance venue to a dance studio, a public library service, outdoor cinema, artistic interventions in the new city scape and greening the rubble. These projects are often initiated by the public or are what Ryan Reynolds calls propositional in approach. They propose a different way of doing things, but loosely enough that participants can shape the development of projects to their own needs. This way the idea is more likely to stick when people take ownership of a project and give it life. It is an interesting strategy that has influenced the research projects approach to social practice. The best of Gap Fillers projects are artistic in form and create not only contemplation but also action in the best sense of the term 'useful' art.

Moodbank by Vanessa Crowe, produced by Letting Space is an interactive piece of public art that was recently hosted at Wynyard Quarter in Auckland. It consisted of an ATM that allowed participants to deposit their moods and then see the amounts of different moods deposited so far on a display of the Moodbank's equity. It also had an option to make a manual deposit. It uses the language of emotions instead of money, to gauge the mood of a particular public. Here the commodification, use and manipulation of emotions are critiqued in an attempt to shift the rhetoric of positive emotions to a wider valuing of all emotional states. Alluding to the commodification of consumer emotions, this work can be read as attempting to detourne this commodification of emotion and instead hand these collective insights back to the public who create them.

The emotional language also seems to attempt to map psycho-geography, as the Situationists would have called it. Psycho-geography being the geographical mapping of location to psychological state or vice versa. The project can thus be read as mapping psychological states on to the geographical location, and perhaps beginning to map how urban development is shaping our psychology.

Artistic Outputs

Waiatarau, Marcel Allen and Renee Warner, Art in the Dark 2014, Western Park Ponsonby Auckland

The interactive video installation *Waiatarau* for Art in the Dark 2014 was made in collaboration with Renee Warner. It had an ecological basis, site specificity and the audience affecting the form and response of the imagined space. Alluding to the ever-shifting shoreline, it attempted to create the feeling of walking through the waves of a bay that could be interpreted as a historical reference about reclaimed land or a potential future under climate change.

This work attempted to use the spectacle of light to transform time and place. To remind participants of what has been and what one-day might be. It attempted to rupture people from the everyday and consider the environment around them, be it the physical one, social, cultural or spiritual.

Reflecting critically, this work fits more within the privileging of the aesthetic side of art forms, than within the politics of harder forms of social practice. If anything, it is a form of soft politicking. It is a symbolic gesture rather than an invitation to co-create beyond that of readability and interpretation.

The mediation of social relations was affected by the spectacle of a large-scale light work that attempted to create a social space for contemplation. This contemplative space was at times hijacked and turned into a dance floor by revelrous festival patrons. This insight suggests that even if a work does not appear to be an invitation to co-create, participants will often find ways to shape its form to their needs. The success of the piece can be read as its creation of a space that allowed the public to express themselves and feel free to find their own way of engaging with each other as much as the underlying ideas and themes.
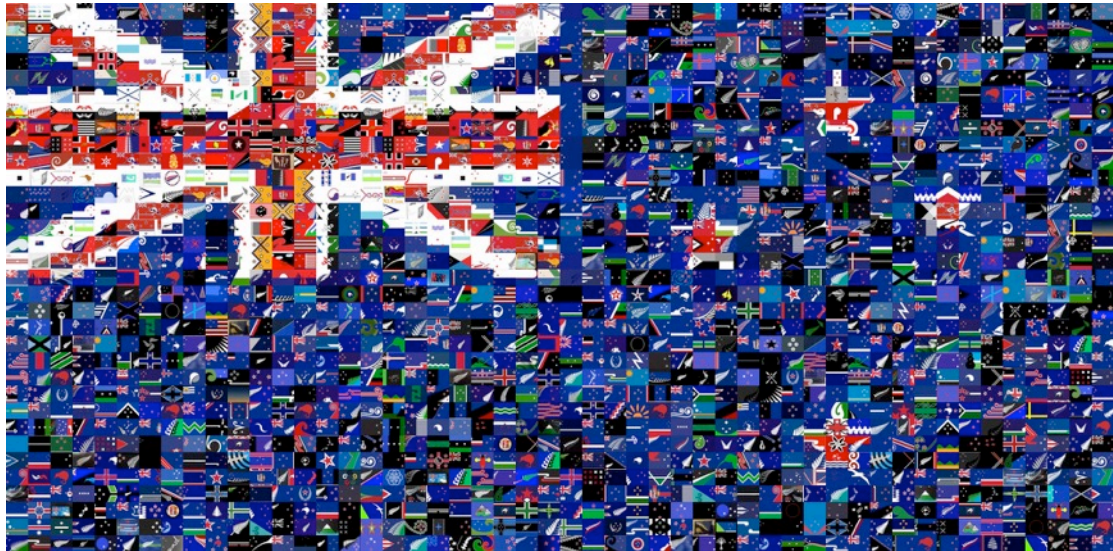
Flag Me, Aotearoa New Zealand Marcel Allen, 2015, final project, Colab AUT

Flag Me, Aotearoa New Zealand looks to critically discuss the New Zealand flag re-design process and referenda, away from the control and consensus inducing flag.govt.nz and standfor.govt.nz websites and the travelling roadshow. It looks to detourne the spectacle of the governments flag re-design process and to address the power structures at work.

The New Zealand flag re-design and referenda were not visibly on the public agenda, which then prompts a discussion about why this is being done. There has been much speculation in the media and the internet about it being a diversion from more important issues, a waste of money or even merely a legacy or vanity project by the current government. Maybe time will tell, but in the mean time it seems crucial to a so-called 'democratic process', to critique the limits of consensus, the censorship of dissensus and the implausibility of assigning meaning to any flag iconography a priori that represents what it 'means' to be a New Zealander.

Detournement in this context can be thought of as a detour or discursive approach to the dominant ideology of a particular subject or phenomena, but it is also subversion and inversion/negation of that ideology. This project looks to provoke subversion and explore the limits of consensus similar to how the magazine Adbusters, subverts marketing language and design in an attempt to invert capitalist ideology. If the editor and founder of Adbusters, Kalle Lasn can launch a meme war that seeks a detournement through subversion, negation and inversion of the visual language of the spectacle of capitalist ideology, can people be provoked into political critique through the aesthetics of flag design?

In terms of analysing the affect and effectiveness of this methodology, Debord's concept of recuperation is key to detournement. It is the process by which the spectacle attempts to smooth over dissensus by re-appropriating the subversion back into its vernacular. A basic example of this is the way in which the rhetoric of revolution is appropriated by advertisers to describe anything that is new or innovative, thus diluting the popular public perception of revolution and equating it

with the free market ideology of liberation by means of consumer choice. Dissensus is commodified and deflated through recuperation.

Claire Bishop's discussion of the recuperation of participatory art, in the form of neo-liberal arts and cultural policy shows the dangers and effects recuperation can have. Bishop points out that the political instrumentalisation of participatory art, in the example of British New Labour in the 1990s ended up serving economic needs more than that of healing the social bond and addressing separation and alienation. "Participation became an important buzzword in the social inclusion discourse, but unlike its function in contemporary art (where it denotes self-realisation and collective action), for New Labour it effectively referred to the elimination of disruptive individuals. To be included and participate in society means to conform to full employment, have a disposable income, and be self-sufficient (from the welfare system)"(Bishop, 2012, loc. 301). Art and culture must resist instrumentalisation and commodification and retain some independence and autonomy in order to not be recuperated by the spectacular order.

The spectacle of the flag debate is already being detourned and subverted on the standfor.co.nz website. The word cloud on the site seems conveniently lacking any of the negative comments to be found further down the page and it will be interesting to see how the government frames these negative reactions and recuperate any loss of face. However the flag.govt.nz website, where the public can submit potential designs, seems like a more controlled environment where anything too negative, ridiculous or critical has been taken down or potentially hasn't even made it to the sight.

Flag Me allows participants to express any and all views and reactions to this process of national identity building. All voices are acknowledged and can be shared within the framework of the installation and beyond it, if people so choose. It is a proposition to engage using digital and analogue means. It is a collaborative work that requires an audience to activate and potentially hi-jack it as a platform for conversation through visual and linguistic means.

Conclusion

The research brings together two apparently divergent trajectories - the reconciliatory convivial aspects of social practice and the disruptive, antagonistic approach of the detournement of spectacle by exploring the tensions of aesthetic and ethical considerations inherent in social practice. Insights into tactical and strategic methodologies have been incorporated into an art practice that focuses on a propositional mode of engagement with the public.

Detournement and recuperation of the spectacle and the mediation of social relations through representation have informed the framework of this practice. It has shown the importance of critical distance in maintaining artistic integrity and emphasised the ethnographic approach required to understand context and site-specificity. This tension of distanciation and an embedded critique of the spectacle and its representations has been pursued in the practice by evolving a more sophisticated degree of improvisation within a more flexible framework in order to allow participants and collaborators to shape the work. This has been extended beyond a simple interaction, into a more critical and responsive engagement of the work by the audience through a propositional and invitational mode of address. It creates provocation without reactionary antagonism and an invitation to play with serious issues. It further develops the ethos that engaging with politics is not only critical to society, but can be a creative and playful process.

Bibliography

Bennett, B. & Dann, J. & Johnson, E. & Reynolds, R. (eds.) (2014). *Once in a Lifetime: City-Building after Disaster in Christchurch.* Christchurch, New Zealand: Freerange Press

Bishop, C. (2012). *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship.* London, New York: Verso. (Kindle edition, 8173 locations)

Bishop, C. (Ed.). (2006). *Participation.* London, Cambridge MA: Whitechapel, The MIT Press.

Bourriaud, N. (2002). *Relational Aesthetics.* Dijon, France: Les presses du reel.

Debord, G. (1967). *Society of the Spectacle.* (Translation: Black & Red, 1977) Bread and Circuses Publishing

Finkelpearl, T. (2013). *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation.* Durham & London: Duke University Press. (Kindle edition, 7195 locations)

Gogarty, L.A. (2014). *Aesthetics and Social Practice* http://keywordscontemporary.com/aesthetics-social-practice/ - _ftnref2 Accessed: 6 June 2015

Kester, G.H. (2011). *The One and the Many: Contemporary Collaborative Art In A Global Context.* Durham and London: Duke University Press. (Kindle edition, 5599 locations)

Kester, G.H. (2015). *Field Journal Editorial / Spring 2015* http://field-journal.com/issue-1/kester Accessed: 28 May 2015

Lasn, Kalle (2012). *Meme Wars: The Creative Destruction of Neoclassical Economics*, New York: Seven Stories Press

Lubow, A. (2010). Making Art Out of an Encounter. *The New York Times.* http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/17/magazine/17seghal-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 Accessed: 28 April 2015

Rancière, J. (2010). *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics.* London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing

Thompson, N. (2012). *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art From 1991-2011.* London, Cambridge MA: Creative Time, MIT Press

Addendum: Documentation

Flag Me, Aotearoa New Zealand was an all-day, open workshop installation situated in the mini-forum area on level 4 of the Sir Paul Reeves building at AUT University on Wednesday 15th of July 2015. The mini-forum area is by a public thoroughfare and next to a space often populated by students. It is an open space often used for functions, seminars and events and features a video wall for presentations. Passersby were invited to participate by the artist.

***Flag Me, Aotearoa New Zealand* installation view**

The installation consisted of an induction video that informed participants about the project as they entered the space.

***Flag Me, Aotearoa New Zealand* induction welcome video**
(View at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3WVj0wFjVLA)

There was a desk with flyers about the workshop and the artist welcomed participants and invited them to create and/or discuss flags, the process of national flag making and political issues to do with the spectacle of the NZ flag referenda and debate New Zealand politics more broadly.

Flag Me, Aotearoa New Zealand

Flag Me was created in response to the New Zealand government's announcement in March 2015, to hold two binding referenda regarding changing the New Zealand flag. The first referendum will decide an alternative flag design, the second will decide whether to change it or not. Flag Me is an invitation to discuss and express opinions about the referenda, the public engagement strategy and more broadly, representational democracy using flag design as a platform.

Flag designs for Flag Me do not have to fit within the official New Zealand government flag design guidelines or the conventions of flag design and vexillology more generally. Flag designs can include text, photos, people as well as graphics. They can be hand made or digitally designed. They can incorporate other designs or be a completely new imagining of what a flag can be.

Provocations for design and conversation:

Why does the New Zealand government want to change the flag?
Do you think the New Zealand flag should be changed?
Is it reasonable to spend twenty six million dollars to find out if New Zealanders want to change their flag?
What is important to you about New Zealand?
What do you think are the main challenges facing New Zealand?
What would you like to say to the government?

Save designs and responses to the dropbox folder photos/flag_me or email to flagmenz@gmail.com

Flag Me, Aotearoa New Zealand **flyer**

Artist welcoming new visitors (photo courtesy of Harry Silver)

There were several computer workstations for digital design and a table with coloured paper, pens and pencils etc. for analogue designs.

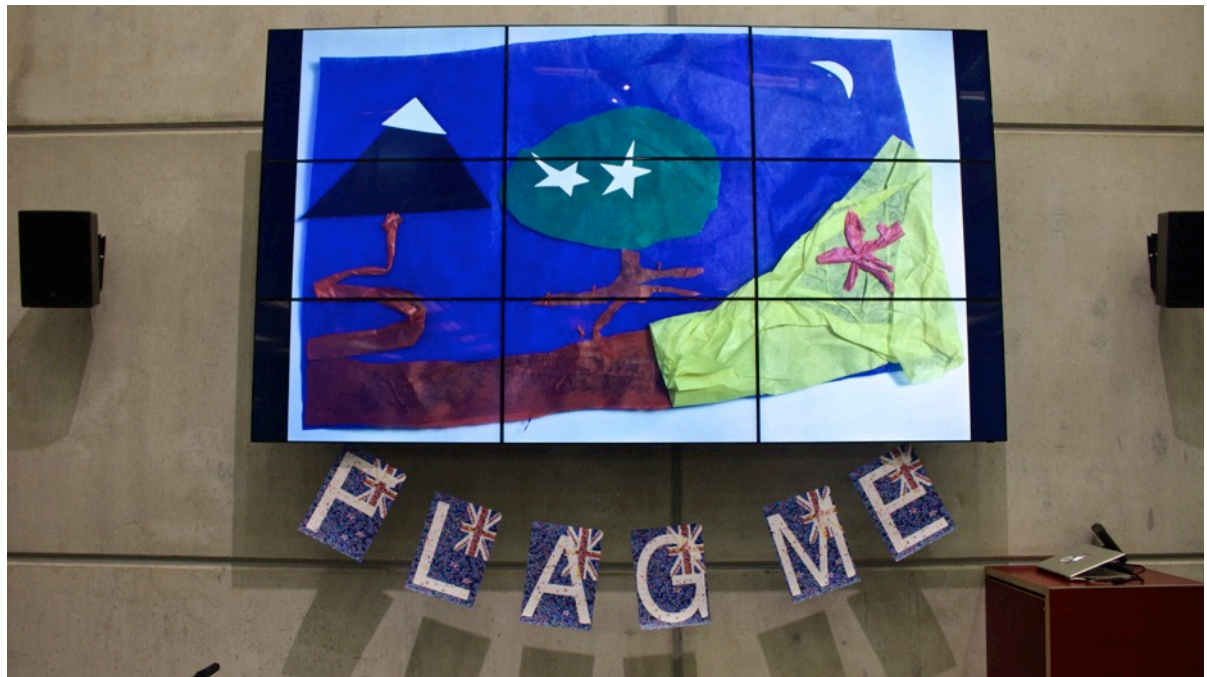**Digital design workstation** (photo courtesy of Stefan Marks)

Analogue design workstation   (photo courtesy of Stefan Marks)

The participant's designs and statements were saved or digitised to a share folder that was displayed on the large screen in a looping presentation that accumulated all the submitted designs.

A captured design made from coloured paper

A captured design fed in to the presentation

Participants were also invited to submit there designs to the official New Zealand Government website if they wanted to. All the submitted designs were posted to the official Facebook page: http://www.facebook.com/flagmenz

Thank you to all who participated.