

Precinct

G.Gorman



"Precinct" was a site-specific art project/performance/exhibit put on by SITE: Buffalo Artist Collective, an organization devoted to a non-traditional approach to art emphasizing the experiential and the value of spectered memories contained in found objects and images. With the aid of the Buffalo Arts Commission, the abandoned police precinct (now destroyed) on Niagara Street on Buffalo's West side was open to the public, occupied and interacted with for a one-day event. This venue was specifically selected in order to bypass the gallerycentric mode of display which tends to dominate the world of art. By doing so, SITE made their work more accessible to a wider range of people than would typically attend an art event held at a commercial art space and thus emphasized the blur that occupies the space between "art" and lived life. The police were no longer using the building and it was an

immobile block of concrete on a busy street, a corner convenience store next door.

This paper explores the psychoanalytic basis for the artwork and the affective response to it vis-à-vis Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, Sigmund Freud's concept of the Uncanny (*Unheimliche*), and Jacques Lacan's notions of the three psychic registers: The Real, The Imaginary and The Symbolic. Through these ideas, an investigation into the meaning-making that occurred when a "real" site was conjoined with pre-made "art", and traversed by people whose responses came to define the installation, is mounted in this essay that confronts what Art Education too often leaves out in favour of visual domination, namely affect and the experiential- the main idea being that the *experience itself* being what the art is, as opposed to a tangible object that results *from* the experience. I argue that there is a lack of focus on contemporary art and the related conceptual and philosophical issues in art teacher training, and that this is ultimately detrimental to the teaching of art k-12.

Art Education too often avoids the political and social issues embedded in the world of art and asks too little from its' students in the way of theory and philosophy. The schism that often exists between departments of Art and Education results in a discrepancy in what is being taught and what work is to be done once teachers enter the schools: a Fine Arts student is typically, and more so recently, expected to support their artmaking practices with critical theory. They are shown numerous examples of other artists' work and philosophers' writing without crippling worry as to its' appropriateness. I venture to say that the norm in k-12 art rooms is to avoid showing work, especially contemporary work; I've hears many excuses why this isn't done, from "they would never sit still", to not having the resources. In this context the common consideration of art is that art should not be on the edge, that art should not be, and is not, a threat, and that art should not make

you question things outside of the realm of personal expression and skill-building: art is of no consequence, is irrelevant, and doesn't have anything to do with anything. This attitude is a negation of art's effect in the world, both past and present. There are too many teachers who embody this safe approach at the expense of their students', and their fellow teachers' and administrators', interest levels. The rarer teacher who refuses to go in this predictable direction has usually received more studio training and has had a wider breadth of exposure to contemporary practice and theory, yet they also often encounter conflicts within their teaching institutions because of this more risky, yet contemporarily appropriate, attitude.

Precinct is an example of art that steps outside of its self-imposed restrictions and, in doing so, successfully jettisons the pedagogical idea that art is an aside to life, a hobby, a release-time, a therapy, "play", and an "easy A". In decentering the space of art *experience*, and in reterritorializing the work that art does, Precinct challenges the aesthetic and social role that art has in our society, favouring art that creates a space for questions, a space of questioning. As an example for students of art, Precinct eschews an object-oriented definition of art in favour of an art that displays in its own manifestation of the conditions from where and when it arose. An artist is a collector, an archivist, finding the material for their work in the world all around, the content being broader than an individual narrative. This precinct place is not neutral, for its history is embodied in its walls, its signs, its dirty floors, in all that was left behind, including a collection of photographs left in the garage to be bulldozed along with the rest of the site. In interacting with the real environment of the police station, art extends itself and intertwines with memories, those of the site and those of the visitors.

The Lacanian register of the Real lies beneath articulation, a realm for memories that escape and transcend experiences to mark the site of an unapproachable trauma that repeats. The Real involves a desire to be recognized through emotional mirroring; "where one can experience

one's own emotions resonating with and amplified by" others (Bracher 2002: 95). According to art theorist Hal Foster, art today shows a radical shift "from reality as an effect of representation to the (Lacanian) real as a thing of trauma" (Foster 1996: 146). Since (failed) articulation within the Symbolic Order is dependent on language, experience and temporality had precedence in the Precinct show, in order that an articulation of affect, through abjection and an encounter with the Lacanian Real might potentially take place. The role of the Other in the Precinct acted as a shaper of experience for the people going through the space; the artwork, as blended with non-art ephemera, triggered responses that, in themselves, became the art, became the *work*. By being pushed and cajoled into the place of the Other, the experiencees took on a shared encounter in which *all* are other and in which, following Kristeva, we are all foreign to ourselves across race, gender, class, etc.; the Others as manifested in and by Precinct share the common trauma of childhood lost.

A Real Place Cited:

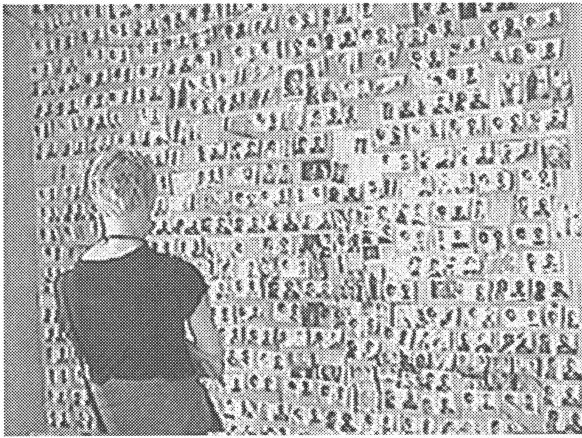
"The uncanny might be understood as a response to the real shock of the modern" (Vidler 1992: 9).

The precinct building is of a modern design, embodying the Modernist project of progress-through-design, utopia-through-space. It is a cube with one main floor and a basement, made of concrete, painted white, recolonized with the black marks of graffiti. The main glass doors bear a file folder taped to the window with "Police have moved to downtown station", scrawled in pencil, almost as an afterthought. Where once they occupied this lower class neighborhood, the paternal presence of the police and their authority have left behind an abandoned building, once again open to the public on this day of exhibition. When people first walk through its glass doors, they are

confronted by a tall wall covered edge to edge, floor to ceiling, with the photographs that were left behind in the box in the garage: mugshots stapled onto identification cards with bits of information, family photos, school yearbook portraits, snapshots, and one especially startling image of a woman being hugged by a man stamped "RAPED". White chalk outlines of (dead) dogs are on the floor that become smudged as visitors cross them- we cannot leave dead dogs lying there; we have an ethical responsibility to make them live again, if only through this representation, as we do the subjects in the photos. This wall is an introduction into the space of Otherness that the Precinct always was and continues to be. It was once a processing center of the disenfranchised, the deviants from The Law: the minority-as-criminal, the woman-as-raped, the ones who couldn't fit in or obey, boys and girls. Their state of being lost to us through time, as manifested in this photographic exhibit, provokes in the viewers a fear of loss in themselves.

These images serve as citations, much as the ones the police handed out, now being handed back as a collective attempt to excavate what was buried, from the unconscious to consciousness. Their indexical value, as Walter Benjamin commented about photographs, makes them "capable of verifying authentic presence". These people belong to the site and, through their resurrection into the light of day and updated time, their virtualized presence points to an actual absence; what was private (i.e.: "RAPED") becomes public. This is an archive that only becomes accessible to all by being unexpectedly found. It is a startling cold fact that all of these fragments of lived life were left to never be witnessed again. In this mass presentation – this excavation – the wall takes on the status of a public memorial. The people represented on the wall are strangers to the people who look at them, yet viewers feel loss as manifested in the details accompanying the physical, visual remains: she was five feet ten inches tall; she was

reported missing on July 12, 1966. Everyone looks hard at these bits of data, trying to pinpoint exactly what's been lost in the visual clues. Because we never knew them, "it is in the affect produced upon the stranger-observer that the real work of the memorial lies... one is possessed by the structure of a loss, but the place that ought to be occupied by the lost object is vacant because you never knew them" (Franses 2001).



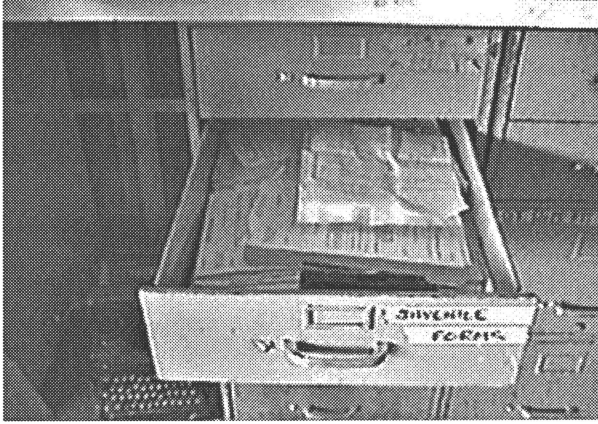
“Photography is a mode of bereavement. It speaks to us of mortification” (Cadava 1995: 224). As *momento mori* there are boxes of images on the countertops that divide the open space, a void really, of the main floor. People stand at the counters and go through the boxes, their entrance into the building sets up the loss that is embodied within it and that we continue to explore and experience throughout it. The familiarity of the people in these photographs attracts, as does the curiosity about why they were arrested: how could they be missing, where are they now? If I was missing someone, I would look through the photographs, hoping to find them, for a photograph is a trace and a mark of them having ever existed at all. And I see so many more ghosts, each one perhaps missed by someone somewhere. Each time I look, I see him and he looks back at me and a connection is made in that frozen stare, my mobility taking away a piece of him through my uncanny acknowledgment; “*einfihlung* –an identifying harmony– with the strange and the different” (Kristeva 2004: 226). In this image he belongs to no one since he is unknowable, only a phantom now. He is what I fear to become, lost and other to the here and now, what I unconsciously know that I am:

With the Freudian notion of the unconscious the involution of the strange in the psyche loses its pathological aspect and integrates within the assumed unity of human beings an *otherness* that is both biological *and* symbolic and becomes an integral part of the *same*. Henceforth the foreigner is neither race nor a nation... *Uncanny, foreignness is within us: we are our own foreigners, we are divided* (Kristeva: 227) (my emphasis).

In his essay “The Uncanny” (1919), Freud attempts to define the German word *Heimlich* only to realize that it contains a double meaning, being at once something familiar and related to the comforts of a home, as well as referring to something kept hidden from view: “Thus *heimlich*

is a word the meaning of which develops in the direction of ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*." Can something be both familiar and unknown? In this double-meaning, *unheimlich* is not the opposite of what is familiar, but acts as a "sub-species" and points to what is being brought to light, to recognition: "The uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (Freud 1919: 220). What is intimate can indeed be secret. The "un" is a "mark of repression.

Uncanny architecture is meant to discomfort and unbalance expectations (Tschumi 1977: 214). "A deconstruction" of the site "undermines the modernist tradition... makes the site look back at the subject" (Eisenman 1992: 21). In this reflection the precinct site has been cited for its history in the crossing of private into public. The people in the photographs were once taken out of the public and processed through this site, now to be turned back to the public once again, as specters, as phantoms. The police themselves are represented by their inordinate amount of empty forms left behind, blanks not filled in but with linguistic categories like "date of incident" remaining. These remaining blanks represent the ultimate impotence of their authority; what can possibly be written about that incident? Who is telling the story? People from the neighborhood, people walking by on the busy commercial street, came into the building unaware that an "art" event was taking place. They knew the place, they may have even been in it. They looked through the images, as did all of the visitors, perhaps for specific people, perhaps wanting to put to rest the questions that were left behind.



“No act, no event falls empty; there is no pure expense, no pure loss in history; everything we do is written down, registered somewhere, as a trace which for the time being remains meaningless but which, in the moment of final settling, will receive its proper place” (Zizek 1989: 42).

Sight Isn't Enough:

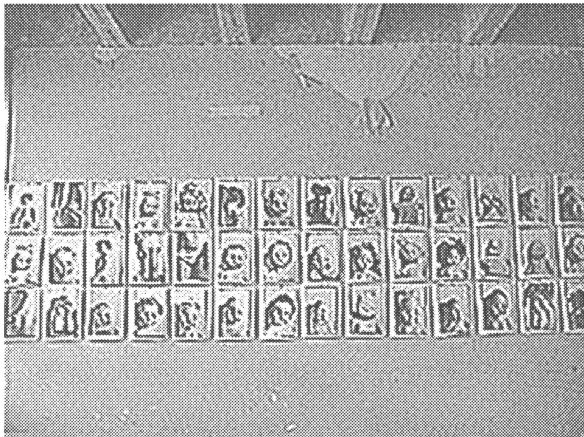
Sight isn't enough. There is a presence “hear” simultaneous with the missing, embodied in a little girl's voice piped through the old public address system, crackly and sing-songy, repeating lyrics written by a grown man, lamentations of childhood fantasies at once lost and still desired, imaginings destroyed by adulthood and the unavoidable entrance into the Symbolic Order:

Maybe I just wanna fly
 Wanna live I don't wanna die
 Maybe you're the same as me
 We'll see things they'll never see
 You and I are gonna live forever

Hey you up in the sky
Tell me how high
Do you think you'll go
Before you start falling
Well that's just too bad
Welcome to my world.
We know just what we are
(Gallagher 1993, 4).

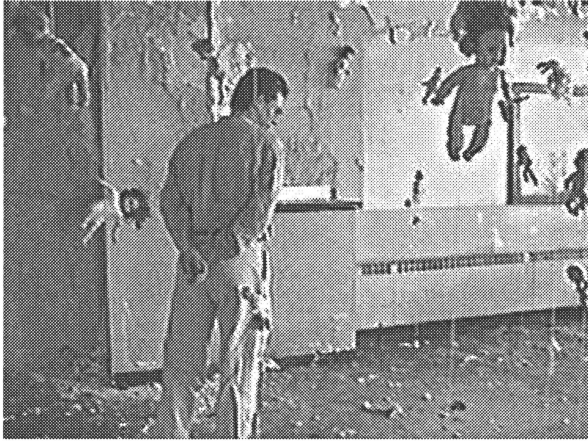
The "you" is everyone listening to her, everyone traveling through the space. She appeals to us to feel, to feel with her, a spirit in the ether, an other who wants something from us, something shared yet futile. One of the rooms bordering the open space is marked "Juvenile Interview Room" on the door with a sign. There's an open closet with a pile of dirty, leaf-strewn little-girl shoes flowing out of it and into an oily puddle on the floor. The wall has two rows of black and white 8" x 10" photographs of dolls, most of them seen shoulders up, as if they had been lined up, one-by-one, to be photographed for this collection. There is one where a boy leans against a wall, his head down as if in shame, casting an extreme shadow. Each face is marked, citing their damage, each doll a discarded object: eyes are hazy or missing, smudges cross cheeks, hair is jaggedly cut. One thinks here of Benjamin's famous remark that photographs are "scenes of crimes". People look at them scared, repulsed, and intrigued, their original signification as things at once nurturing and to be nurtured is abruptly challenged as they become Other in their abjection from us; in Julia Kristeva's words, a "conjunction of waste and object of desire" (Kristeva, POH: 110); by being both, uncanny.

According to Kristeva, one objects from oneself what is other in order to create the boundaries that allow us to become subjects in the world, a process for all infants: “expelling what is deemed ‘other’ to ‘oneself’, it is a means for defining the borders of subjectivity” (McCaffee 2004: 57). To become a distinct self, one needs to have borders, demarcations between oneself and what is not oneself, starting with disconnection from the mother’s body, “the child’s own origin” (McCaffe 2004: 45). What we were once a part of becomes other to us, yet still retains traces of our presence. Our desire is born for what we cannot have. Subjecthood cites separation, and separation necessitates the entrance into the Symbolic Order. One reading of these dolls then is that, not only are they what have been abjected, but they have become abject in their existence in between damage and desire, representing abandonment by the children who once owned them, and here becoming ambiguous objects of fantasy, fixed in the Imaginary, transformed into objects of the uncanny for those who look upon them: “the uncertainty that I call abjection” (Kristeva, POH: 208). The adults viewing these images have repressed their own casting-off of dolls or stuffed-animals that they once knew intimately, for it was a violent act and accompanied by loss and probably guilt that has since been repressed. In seeing them so marked, so scarred and full of neglect, the abjection that is still with them comes forwards: “What is abjected is radically excluded but never banished altogether.... not simply repressed because they’re not entirely gone from consciousness... they are a threat to one’s own clean and proper self” (McCafee 2004: 46). The past and the present coalesce. Who was forgotten? Who was left behind? Who is buried within us?



Yet, still, sight is not enough. If, for Benjamin, photographs have “an ambiguous status as both an image suspended in an ever-present and (are) a concrete artifact of the past” (Przyblyski 1998: 1), than the actual dolls embody unclaimed and hazy aura. Across the hall is a room full of distilled light coming through the wall of dirty windows. The dolls are suspended from a chaotic web of rope criss-crossing the honeycombed concrete ceiling: they hang in multiple positions and at varying heights, some falling, some flying, some barely hanging on. The little girl continues to sing: “Maybe I just wanna fly...”. The floor is strewn with clumps of their shorn hair amidst more oily puddles, as

if they went through a process stripping them of their identity. (A child will ask if the hair will grow back.) One of them clasps a plastic bird in its hand. As artist Ernesto Pujol once said: "Every object is guilty of a message".



As children dolls are given to us to nurture and, in turn, we, as children, expect them to care for us as well; they are other to us in this reciprocity. This doubling becomes a stand-in for the mother, whose symbiotic relationship with her infant needed to be disrupted for subjectivity of the child to emerge, and for Lacan's Symbolic Order of the father's law and language to organize and contain us. "The primary narcissism of the child has the double as a protection against extinction" (Freud 1919: 235), yet these dolls, in being abjected, have become "what the law excludes", the unspeakable, "the other side of sacred" (Kristeva, POH: 110). The occurrence of abjection "conjures up a memory of the self prior to its entrance into the symbolic realm, prior to becoming a subject proper" (McCafee 2004: 49). This symbolic realm is the stage necessary for subjectivity to occur, the place where paternal authority -the Name-of-the-Father- takes over for the abjected maternal body: "The importance here of the father is that he arrives on the scene as the intervening third party between the mother and the child... which retrospectively becomes the model of harmony" (Blum and Nast 2000:

186). But the police men are all gone. And what became of the mother's body?

Sites of In-Between:

The next room over has another wall of windows facing four jail cells. One walks the narrow path between and finds the last cell looking quite domestic: different patterns of wallpaper cover the walls and there are piles of handmade knitted afghans on the platform that serves as a bed, surrounding the toilet, blanketing the concrete floor. These blankets make me think of the Irish Republican Army's Blanketmen, who protested the British government's refusal to give them political prisoner status by not wearing the prison uniforms given to them, instead draping themselves with coarse prison blankets. Those persons were abject as persons-out-of-place, crossing boundaries, at once fighting for their freedom and being punished for their stand outside the dominant discourse, abjecting themselves further by smearing their feces on the walls of their cells in further protest of their negation in the order. In this domestic cell, this home, no prisoner is present but the door is open, the sunlight casts a warm glow onto the walls. There is an odd inversion of the confines of a jail cell and the comfort of this homey (*heimlich*) space. Over the bed are taped numerous black and white images of people, mostly women, in erotic and inviting positions, their eyes or faces or genitals covered over with black ovals, with numbers on them instead of names, seemingly torn from a magazine or newspaper. One knows not whether these are displayed to excite or to repel, for they seem to do both at once with their suggestive postures and anonymity. (Are they easier to look at because they don't stare back?) There is a feeling of welcome that smashes up against the knowledge that this is a prison cell; the bars cast shadows across the people in the photographs.

Whoever's "home" this is seems to be holding hard to some form of intimate contact with people through this displayed collection, but the images seem more about control than sexual excitation, since the subjects figured lack faces or names and, as images, they are "owned" by someone and fixed in the death of the photographic image. They look homemade, like they were taken with cheap cameras and photocopied on cheap paper; are they advertising themselves for sexual encounters? They seem to fit into the realm of pornography in that they preserve a supposedly safe distance between people, although they don't seem to be exciting anyone: how can you tell, who would admit to it? The photographs distance as they attract, the issue of safety in this blanketed space relating to the precinct as a whole: "to protect and to serve." The images operate in the realm of fantasy, representing an ideal of a sexual partner as someone who has no name- "no strings attached"- safer than a face-to-face relationship, an Imaginary. The writer Martin Amis once commented on pornography as "a parody of love so it addresses itself to loves opposite which are hate and death." The desire meets up with and embraces the damage.





“The mother, her sex and her blood, are relegated to the realm of the cursed and the sacred- along with sexual pleasure, which is thus rendered both fascinating and inaccessible” (Lefebvre 1991: 35-6).

Nothing Disappears Without A Trace:

Down the hall stairs lead into darkness. On a landing is a storage room with a chair placed in front of a small television that has a black and white grainy image from a closed-circuit surveillance camera on it. Sitting on the chair and standing around it are people watching who is being watched: a humanoid, a human-sized dog, white with large black polka-dots. It’s sitting in a corner of a barely-lit room on a blanket. Clearly it’s someone in a dog costume but it’s just sitting there and not moving, its chin in its hand/paw. People watch and wait for some sign of life, the significance of a fuzzy dog creating concern, another other, like the dolls, who we want to care for and who we want to care for us.

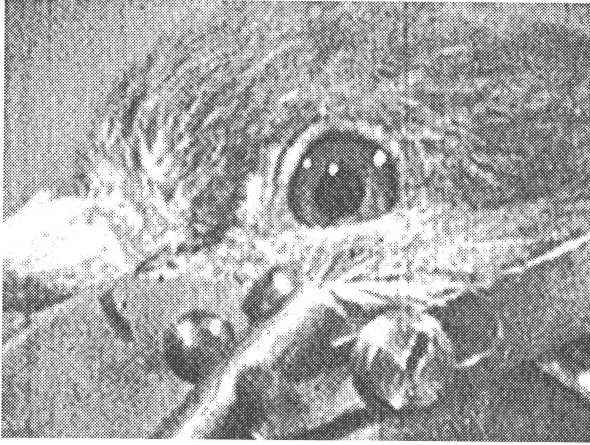
Downstairs the basement is a blackened corridor that looms ahead and a film projector is set there on a stool, casting a film loop on the back wall of a pigeon in some sort of mechanical apparatus being spun around. The sound of the projector echoing in the hallway seems to

belong to this tortuous-looking device that the pigeon is held in. The image is pink with age, reminiscent of elementary school film-viewing. The loop alternates from a close-up shot of the pigeon blinking, to one of it being spun about by this monstrous machine. This educational science film sample subversively references Frederick Nietzsche when he wrote that “the entire knowledge-apparatus is an abstraction and simplification, an apparatus not directed at knowledge but rather at gaining control over things”, its looping repetition bearing “the eternal return” of senselessness or, as Freud posits, of trauma.

The looping pigeon is a symptom of trauma -a mark of our repression of it- in its compulsive repetition: “Freud traced the repetition compulsion to its vanishing point at the threshold of consciousness. Here the symptom’s loss of apparent meaning marked the intervention of repression, a process to which he ascribed a protective function: because the symbolic solution brings no fruition, the neurotic activity is repeated” (Mann). And, as opposed to finding resolution in the Symbolic Order of language, this trauma is confined within the realm of the Imaginary, of images and fantasies, caught up in the mechanisms of transference and identification; from us to pigeon- another helpless animal- returning against our will. As Cathy Caruth has stated, the traumatic event itself “is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time” (Caruth 1995: 8), and trauma demands repetition.

The image mirrors our own sense of increasing confinement as we head down to the end of the basement, towards its last room, the pigeon image getting larger and larger as if we are to be engulfed by it, the basement itself manifesting our unconscious and the trauma we bury there in the dark, by now significantly attached to our own memories of childhood. Is this trauma being raised the trauma induced by the ever-present rupture from childhood to adulthood? Is this Lacan’s Real confronting us as a remnant of what was *not* left behind,

of what remains... nameless? By now we are melancholic, "the result of a less specific sense of loss, including a fragmentation from having been slighted, neglected, or disappointed many times" (Freud 1917).

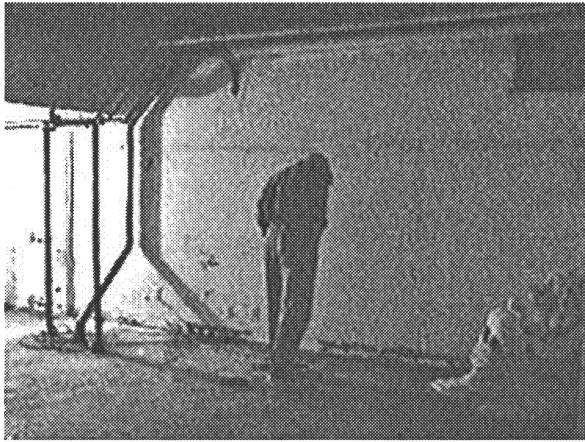


This Space is Real, It Knows Who We Are:

As the projected image slips off of our bodies we enter a room lit by a single light bulb. This is the end of the line, our arrival point. There is a faded painted and stained map of the city on one wall. Our eyes adjust and there is the human-like dog in the corner. He/she/it just sits there on its blanket. We notice how dirty its fur is. It is damp in here. It's wearing sneakers. It must be cold. Some people, upon seeing the dog, react audibly, crying out variations on "Oh dear," or "Oh my god, poor thing," as they move closer, arms protectively across their chests. Others instantly move away or leave the room altogether, not fast enough. Two boys egg each other on, one pushing the other forward while saying, "Kick it!" The other boy resists and they both turn and flee. Not fast enough. Someone pats its head and it looks up at them and we utter something endearing. Throughout, it is silent.

The experiences of displacement, abjection, the Uncanny, and slipping signifiers culminate in a transference of all resultant anxiety to this ultimate Other, the unspeaking, inexplicable dog, whose image

we have foreseen, whose occupation of this space has been foretold, whose presence really never left us as absence took its place. It returns to us now; there is an identification with it as we yearn for a childhood *ideal*, as something we still desire but now know never really existed, for it remains unfulfilled. A projection too of our hurting, lacking selves as lost objects, and it represents this lack more fully since it is not just a stuffed animal, a once familiar object, but an anthropomorphized one, wearing dirty shoes, uncanny in its insistence that it is real, that it is *here*, the inanimate becoming animated before us. "Memory and fantasy work together to deal with loss, absence, and frustration", and "there can never be remembering or forgetting without fantasy, emotionality, and unconscious motivation" (Treacher 2000: 137).



As subjects traversing this space, making this journey through an allegorical unconscious, we think we know who we are just as we feel that there's something missing. We are uncanny beings. In being confronted – no, not just “confronted”, but approached and interacted with visually, aurally, temporally, and spatially – by what is uncertain in both the abject and the Uncanny, this split *feels*. This split which is (within) us is brought without, inside to outside, and the boundaries which help contain our perpetual misrecognition as Lacanian split subjects are exteriorized in symbiosis with the space of this building, *this place of abandoned paternal authority and condemned maternal absence*.

To quote Michel de Certeau in regards to this movement: “The circle never quite closes, rather the transformations of the encounter mean change is introduced, and there is a gap between a starting and finishing point. This gap, the space created through the Other, drives narratives onwards to try and fill it, yet they only reinscribe the loss” (Crang 2000: 144).

Hey you up in the sky
 Tell me how high
 Do you think you'll go
 Before you start falling
 Well that's just too bad
 Welcome to my world.
 We know just what we are
 (Gallagher 1994).

Teaching What We Know...

That our failure to know constitutes our desire to know more, should be a crucial part of Art Education. If as arts educators we wish, as most of us do, to privilege process over product, then we need to

engage with philosophy and critical theory that will help to satiate our students' dire needs to know in a world where nothing is certain; they are not "empty vessels" waiting to be filled, but are contemporary split subjects who are challenged to negotiate a complex culture of mixed messages and pervasive lack on an everyday basis. We need to stop underestimating their capacity for understanding concepts that are grounded in fundamental questions of being-in-and-of-the-world. The Precinct show exhibited a pre-existing body of work (the dolls and the doll photographs) into a lived space, as opposed to exhibiting them in an art gallery, as well as intervened in the existing space and its already-present objects and spatiality. The art gallery is typically a sterile environment –a blank slate- that allows the work being shown in it to be what it is without outside forces shaping it. In opposition to this apparent neutrality, the site of Precinct shaped the work towards a social, political, and historical relevance that would otherwise be negated or, at best, missing. There is an interplay at work between the space and the things, and it was this very relationship and the space it engendered that became the work itself.

In my experience as an Art Teacher I often have to combat the claim that art is irrelevant; students who are in a required class often make this claim and resist the art because of it. In my opinion this is a valid claim if one sticks to a traditional and out-dated approach to artmaking and art history. I find that so much of the artwork, from past and present, that engages with the lived world in non-traditional ways is simply not included in the curriculum or in the art teacher's own realm of experience and education. Art as a force, art as idea, art as experience and philosophy, are all concepts too often omitted from Art Education, yet they can serve as incredible attractors for students who resist art because of its supposed superfluousness. Precinct, in blurring the illusory line between art and life, acts as an example of art that is relevant, of art that both comes to and out of an historical moment

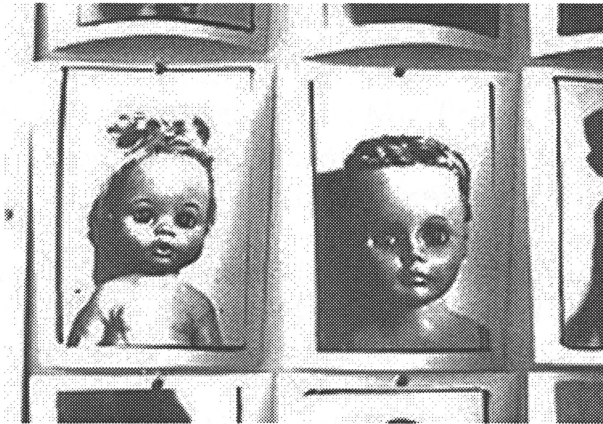
and place. Its engagement with people, through its archive of images and through its opportunity-to-journey through an opened space, crosses disciplines from Art to Sociology, to History, to Psychology. The artist as archivist, as researcher, is an example here for students of art to realize that art produces, not only things, but emotional and intellectual responses and questions, that it can produce work itself instead of just being work. Art has a social role if we are willing to go beyond traditional aesthetics; like Theodor Adorno and Krzysztof Ziarek, I would like to see:

a 'different' status of art in relation to forces – life, material, social – a peculiar status that does not make art separate from society but allows it, even though it remains embedded in and shaped by society, to redispense its forces into alternative and transgressive configurations that operate outside of the dialectic of critique (Ziarek 2002: 220).

Our students struggle with the same de-centered positions as we do, as does so much of contemporary art. In the junior high and high school, they are at the crux of leaving childhood behind and this trauma – this loss – can be worked through in creative ways that relate their own world with what's going on in their school/artroom/studio. In using psychoanalytic theories to *see* this work, I am trying to show what Homi Bhabha meant when he said that psychoanalysis offers “a way of questioning what is the private in the public and what is the public in the private”: how relevance is manifested. The Precinct show exemplified the openness that results in bypassing the Symbolic Order's need to define “art”; its experiential and site-specific emphasis contests the typical product-oriented approach to artmaking found in k-12 classrooms. The current call for integrating cultural studies into art curriculum can benefit from recognition of our (students included)

subject positions as others, and from teaching psychoanalytic ideas and approaches by showing how they are and can be manifested in our art production and experience, and in our ways of reflecting back onto them.

Julia Kristeva has written that “psychoanalysis is then experienced as a journey into the strangeness of the other and of oneself, toward an ethics of respect for the irreconcilable”. This “irreconcilable” is a state of being other, whether because of something as specific as the colour of your skin, or of the internalized estrangement of our human condition, or of the conflicted perpetual movement from child to adult and back again. Kristeva claims that we are all other and that the other is within us. Precinct was an opportunity to visit this upon ourselves, thereby taking an ethical position of empathy:



“How could one tolerate a foreigner if one did not know one was a stranger to oneself?” (Kristeva: 227).

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