

tiny revolutions

intervention

we thought for the purpose of this forum and the theme of tiny revolutions, we could talk in more detail about some key aspects we grapple with in our work. one of which is the role that intervention plays.

the widest definition of intervention for us would be to find a way to trespass beyond the normal urban experience to provide space for a broader questioning of the way things are. so whether we're driving buses around a city or pulling tug of war ropes, or placing stickers on cars with instructions on how to steal them, we're hoping to provoke some dialogue about key issues of our time. and to do it in ways that don't dictate or preach. as for us we feel that the more obviously political a work is, the less transformative potential it has. I always really liked what joseph beuys says about 'society being the material for artists to transform'. I think that's a really beautiful challenge and our response to it is to find creative ways to intervene in the landscape.

so for example with our tts: australia body of work, which is a site seeing terror bus tour of 4 cities we set ourselves various intervention based activities. in melbourne, we walked our audiences from one end of crown casino to the other, without permission in a heavily monitored environment. on-site performers were positioned at pokie machines and would approach individual audience members to intimately describe the terror around them. in sydney, our audiences hurled imaginary projectiles at the opera house nightly, under the direction of audio instructions. we secured a permit for this by describing it as a choreographed public dance. in adelaide, we drove our audiences to an infamous beat each night at one of the parklands where we situated an on-site performer inside a car amongst the other cars there.

theres a couple of strategies for intervention being played here. one we see as a process of infiltration with a subtle invasion of a space that doesn't overtly draw the attention of authority figures. the other is subverting public spectacle so it has a dual meaning. one for participants, the other for passers by.

when we work on-site in public, we are constantly mindful of what the comfort and safety levels are for ourselves and audiences. but still have this urge to push at the boundaries of audience / performer dynamics and take risks. we are completely inspired by audiences who come along with us for the ride, willing to push with us. because its nothing without them really. we're totally prepared to fail, [we'd rather not] but what's an artwork without some form of risk?

so as you've seen the majority of our work intervenes in public and quasi-public spaces and the past few years we have been tackling this self initiated challenge of how can we instigate tiny revolutions in public. asking ourselves questions like: how can we transform public spaces and what are the traces we leave behind. how can we creatively challenge the social norms, the rules and the authority upon which they are founded. what are the politics of public space and how do we negotiate the terrain of the street as our subject matter. how does the work fit into the broader social framework of which we are a part.

we don't have answers for most of these, so it is a process of discovery and we usually find out thru doing.

strategies for mis-behaviour

economy of truth:

some strategies that we've tried over the years usually are based finding an economy of truth that allows the work to function in a particular environment. so its about saying the right things to the right people and framing the work in a certain light.

so for example we were invited to show reform [the community street policing initiative] in singapore in 2008, which was amazing, but it meant that we had to be really careful about how we describe the work in light of the singaporean culture of excessive policing. the only way for this work to operate in this environment was to talk about it purely in the realm of comedy. so midway thru this commission, we found

ourselves on singaporean breakfast television, with our passports confiscated and a stern briefing from tv producers about not saying anything inflammatory about the government. it made for an interesting and stressful interview, where we just talked about the humour in reform and how certain laws are in-fact funny. so we tried to distance the work from being critical of anti-social behaviour laws and focussing more on how the rules we live by make us behave. which wasn't completely false at all, but was just looking at the work from a particular perspective.

play:

another key one for us that sits very close to our hearts is this notion of play and finding the fun by wrapping a difficult subject matter around a game or a task.

we found **role-playing** is a good strategy as it allows for a sense of detachment. so for example with reform our audiences were referred to as 'repeat offenders' learning how to behave responsibly on the street. with this set as their collective identity, they not only felt part of the work but also more inclined to undertake performative tasks alongside us.

game-playing is a slightly different approach as it transforms the work and the concept into the realm of a game, with the site becoming the playground. with transumer, an i-phone app we had developed as a mobile tool for instigating a modern day revolution. we invite audiences to play the app and clandestinely take over their city by placing gps based 'tags' that identify how they want to disrupt or intervene at a specific location.

appropriation is another key one for us. in resist, which is our the tug of war conflict resolution service, we undertake public tug of war competitions aiming to look at what issues divide a community and what people are prepared to do to enact change. the aspect of play is very physical in this work and we take an existing sporting game and appropriate it to our own needs.

last year, we had the amazing opportunity to mount resist on-board a moving train as part of a one day festival called rolling stock, in june, a rural town in nsw. for this version members of pvi spent a short period in residence soliciting information from the local community about issues that needed to be resolved. publicans, politicians, historians, shoppers and school children were canvassed asking them to not only identify problems but suggest solutions that they would like to see enacted.

some of the issues are projected behind us. we then took our list to a local council meeting and formally presented it to the mayor and her councillors. we've got a little clip we shot via iphone we can play back here.

what was really delightful was that local councillors were so curious about the issues that were raised, they came along to the train ride and then formally accepted the results of the tug of wars that day, with the intention of reviewing them as part of the new social policy they were strategizing within the community.

I think we had always seen this work as a bizarre mix of part community consultation, part conflict resolution service and a physical performance, but we have always struggled with what impact can it have in the 'real world'.

which brings us onto our current work, 'transumer: deviate from the norm' which will be showcased at adhoc after a two week development with local artists here. and of course we're v excited about it! and completely blown away by the hugely talented posse of artists who put their hands up to work with it on us.

deviate

so deviate from the norm is a site-based intervention inviting audiences to undertake tiny acts of resistance against their built environment.

at the beginning of the work you are issued with a self assembled deviation kit which is full of disguises and d.i.y tools, and your armed with a customised iphone which plays a timed movie with map and audio instructions. and for half an hour you navigate your way thru your city and at various sites are invited to undertake activities that deviate from the norm.

we spend a lot of time researching and often end up with a quote as a hook for an artwork and that's what's happened with this work. the quote that really resonated with us was:

"big changes often start with acts that look pointless at the time"

its from a book called crack capitalism by a radical scholar called john holloway, where he posits a theory of finding small acupuncture points in society and discovering ways to apply enough pressure to cause it to crack. so he cites the historic action of black american activist, rosa parks and her refusal to sit at the back of the bus, as a seminal 'seemingly pointless act' that actually became the symbol of the modern human rights movement. so she wasn't making a demand, she wasn't even in opposition, she was simply acting in a different world.

and so from this, our rationale was to try, in this work, to act out a world that doesn't yet exist ,in the hope that by acting it out, we might breathe life into it somehow. so we will be devising a number of 'pointless acts' in response to port adelaide in an attempt to subvert the official narratives of public space.