



The Gap Between Everything

Curt Riegelneegg

This exhibition was built in a strange climate, and on shifting ground. Far away, a re-evaluation of the constraints on communication has led to a strange, spasmodic, linked-in version of domino theory, which has toppled numerous regimes in the Middle East and may topple more.¹ At the same time that Libyan rebels clamor for a tangible victory, an artist with a global imprint has disappeared into the murk of his own state's machinery of repression. The exhilaration of democratic potency, lately, mingles unabashedly with the grim display of authoritarian implacability. These disturbances of what we understood to be the order of things, in spite of the distance at which they originate, seem increasingly insistent on hijacking our attentions.

A little exhibition in a little gallery is just that, by comparison, but how can the disparate objects and motions and voids inside of it help process the polarities, and retain the sense of personal agency that makes these distant events more real to we who view them?

The exhibiting artists of Public Gesture have chosen a range of methods to negotiate the divide. On the surface, the work of Vukasin Nedeljkovic, who emigrated from Serbia, concerns issues of asylum and the trauma of Diaspora. Rather than being the work's real thrust, though, the threads of geopolitics serve only as its circumstances. Nedeljkovic is not attempting a polemic on bureaucratic immobility or the inertia of social divisions. Rather, he is plumbing the leagues of his own heartache and confusion, in lending his voice to the words of his deceased mother, with whom the artist was denied a proper farewell.

The source of Nedeljkovic's pain, red tape and the threat of reprisals, is unfortunate, but in the casual, fretful details of his mother's words and the daily aggravations of an asylum seeker, we hear echoes of the mingled universals of hope and loss. It's a tincture of hard policy and soft humanity that Trish McAdam addresses more didactically, adding one more voice to the many who have been, in print or in the streets, petitioning for the release of Ai Weiwei. Following a year of perhaps the worst incursions on human rights that China has made in a decade, and preceded by the similar incarceration of poet, scholar, and activist Liu Xiaobo, among others, Ai has become another unshakeable ghost, the nature of his abduction recently over-taking the prominence of his work, even in the only squeamishly political confines of the art world.² McAdam, simply disinclined to silence, has painstakingly rendered a brisk animation, which she describes as an advertisement, one with an unequivocal rallying cry to free an innocent man.

Some of the exhibiting artists prefer to cloud their work's legibility. Aoife Flynn envelops the viewer in a narrative much hazier than that of Nedeljkovic or McAdam, constructing physical cul-de-sacs that function as cognitive interstices. Built, and sequestered at the far end of the LAB's central room, to look somehow both used and abandoned, her tiny hovel is an unsettling nowhere zone, stiflingly uneventful but vaguely threatening. Loosely referencing the clichés of apocalyptic science fiction narratives, she leaves it to the viewer to smell the residue of obsession and frustration over stymied efforts at salvation. Gaping and unknowable, it is a mutation of the oppression that is McAdam's distant enemy. With Flynn, the unseen threat is perversely devoid of identity, and dangerously close.

Though no one exemplifies unsettling proximity as well as Terrence Erraught. Artists, since Robert Morris and Hannah Wilke, have

long undermined the sanctity of distance between work and viewer by making themselves the work, and then confronting the viewer. In plastering his exposed body against the window of the gallery, while respectfully covering himself where visible from the outside, Erraught is strangely mindful of the conventional boundaries. Rather than being calculated, his intrusions seem instinctive and curiously incomplete, not aggressive enough to constitute a critique, but too profane and present to be solely expressive. It is a subversion of the regular strategies of subversion, reveling in its own obliquity.

In planning for this exhibition, the curatorial team encouraged the fourteen exhibiting artists to introduce their practices into the gallery space as they saw fit. While the challenge of integrating disparate work into a functional public show should not be overlooked, the works establish the ever-sought-after "dialogue" with one another more effectively than such a loosely orchestrated exhibition might have allowed for. Situated together in the space, they affect a cogent fragmentation, indicative of the insufficiency of a neat aesthetic wholeness to function in a never-whole human universe. After all, with the recent transpiring of the halting and bloodied advances toward freedom and the intricate and entropic ordeals of a more unified Europe and an exhausted Ireland, the simplicity of a common thread seems inadequate in representing anything beyond itself. It is the partially lucid, broken conversation that seems relevant and honest, and in that honesty, there is a modicum of comfort.

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1. The "domino theory" was initially used by then U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower in 1954 to warn against the spread of communism.

2. His cause has been most recently taken up by Anish Kapoor, as reported in *the Guardian*, Tuesday, 10 May, 2011

The Ones We Don't Know We Don't Know

Ciara Moloney

There are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns – the ones we don't know we don't know. – Donald Rumsfeld, 2002

Citing a now infamous example of political Newspeak may seem a poor start to an essay – and art probably does move in less mysterious ways than the former US Secretary of Defense – but there is something to be said for Rumsfeld's description of the unquantifiable. The role art plays in showing us the things we didn't realise we didn't know resonates for a number of the artists in Public Gesture. Released into the wild from the relative safety of the educational institution, this interim exhibition provides a platform for this postgraduate class to test their work in a public forum.

Debora Ando's contribution, *How to project it*, sees the artist adhering coloured tape onto the pavement and façade of The LAB in formations which she will adapt every day of the exhibition. It will be a unique, site-specific work – the lengths are based on the proportions of the building interior, serving to effectively extend the building beyond static architectural space and into the street. Neither scheduled nor publicly advertised, this is conceived more as action than as object or performance in the spirit of Fluxus groups like the High Red Center. While this represents a new mode of operation for Ando, trained as a printmaker, it also represents a continuation of her investigations into urban environments, entropy and decay. As the day wears on, the tape will begin to show the degradation from a day in Dublin's inner city and this will be seen in negative when it is pulled off again, leaving a clean imprint behind on the path.

Creating work from everyday, disposable materials conversely makes the experience of the work all the more precious, existing as it does for only a few fleeting moments. The artist's daily reconfiguration of the tape introduces a contingency and unpredictability to the exhibition context, undermining the self-containment of the white cube and forging a conversation between the artwork and the city. Situated in the street rather than the gallery, and without fanfare or ceremony, the work asks the audience to consider their definitions of art. Whether or not it qualifies as such for the passer-by, Ando's inversion of the building from the inside out is an inclusive gesture, constituting a negotiation of the politics of public space and what is permissible therein, while also acting as a striking metaphor for the ever-changing rules that striate the public domain.

Jessica Conway's sound works also disrupt the normative boundaries of the exhibition context, though in a rather different way. These recorded sounds – titters, grunts, throat-clearing and the like, in-between noises more than words – are accompanied by wall labels and given form with titles like *Wwwhew*, *Ieuighh* or *Emmm*, thus elevating inchoate sounds to the status of words. It is testament to the nuances of human expression that the slightest variation in emphasis produces entirely different effects and, from beckoning sounds to hesitations, the sounds are inescapably associative. That there is no intrinsic relation between sound and graphic form, between signifier and signified is apparent in the inadequacies of these phonetic renderings which attempt to serve as a visual referent for the immaterial. Highlighting the gap between notation and actual sound, Conway questions the efficacy of the linguistic hierarchies we agree to be bound by and their role in shaping our knowledge. When does a sound become classified as a word/not a word? What merits a signifier and who enacts this process of deciderization?¹

Played openly in the space, intermingling with the other works in the exhibition, it is probable that visitors may encounter labels before sounds, or vice versa. This placement and the arrhythmia of the recordings are deliberately discomfiting, serving to undermine the typically elucidatory structure the exhibition effects on artworks within, denying our need for pattern and confounding our expectations. Conway's neo-Duchampian granting of titles and captions to these absurd sounds (reminiscent, occasionally, of farmyard animals) draws attention to the legitimising power of labels and the authority granted by exhibition infrastructures.

The limitations of the frameworks through which we access knowledge are key too to the work of Sarah Roche. In the sound work *Dark Night*, two voices can be heard simultaneously; one reciting star names with another singing words from *Dark Night of the Soul*, by St John of the Cross, to a melody composed by Roche (who also moonlights as a musician). The voice intoning stars is 'neutral' and machine-like, standing in for logocentric reasoning, typically privileged by Western society over more intuitive kinds of learning, attained heuristically via doing – art-making, music-making or what Roche terms 'warm' knowledge. This latter is represented by the delicate sung element of the work. Dark matter (which accounts for over 80% of all matter) is used by Roche as an analogy for mysterious other knowledge, for that which is unquantifiable. Roche critiques the limitations imposed on learning by rigid systems relying on targets, numbers and definable goals.

Roche's melody soars movingly over the steady bass rhythm of scientific terminology. The instant attraction to the floating, barely tangible element of the recording, rather than the 'scientific' part, highlights the value of a different kind of knowing, the less straightforward, more freeform and experimental. The work celebrates the transcendence associated with surrendering to knowledge, the potential excitement and ecstasy of losing oneself in the act of learning via the immediacy and rousing effects of song. Roche argues against the increasingly instrumental nature of our culture, in which things are done only for direct ends and accidents or mistakes become less acceptable, despite the creative opportunities engendered by wrong turns, mistakes, messes and failures.²

This is in keeping with the impetus behind Public Gesture as a whole. Exhibition-making represents part of practice and can function therefore as a means of learning – for both audience and artist. The experimental nature of the work on show is very much a conscious decision given the pedagogic context of its production. While it may not always be fully resolved, the work thwarts straightforward categorisation, resisting its own self-imposed constraints and those we may put upon it. It holds the promise of further research and development as befits the concept of the gesture – that which is connotative rather than denotative. Public Gesture represents an opportunity to witness nascent artistic practices and we should acknowledge the privilege of seeing work in progress and the courage it takes to place an evolving practice in the public arena. Hopefully this show will reveal to us a few more unknown unknowns.

Ciara Moloney is a writer based in Dublin, where she also works as gallery manager at mother's tankstation.

1. That wonderful term coined by David Foster Wallace to describe the power of the editor, invoking the torturous linguistic conceits that George W. Bush, Rumsfeld's Commander-in-Chief, was equally guilty of. 'Deciderization 2007 – a Special Report', *The Best American Essays 2007*, (Houghton Mifflin: 2007)
2. Two clichés are apposite here: 1) the only thing worse than failing is not trying and 2) Beckett's "Try again. Fail again. Fail better." aphorism.

Notes on Conducting

Rowan Sexton

The curatorial strategy for Public Gesture was devised to illustrate and endorse the variety of skills emanating from a diverse range of practitioners. It aims to highlight the independent roles of artist, critic and curator, and to foster an environment where the synergy born of working in partnership is evident. It encapsulated elements from the theoretical to the practical, the speculative to the operational, and engaged with the factors at play that have shaped the exhibition, such as the available timeframe, resources, and the parameters of producing an independent student exhibition, in the context of MAVIS, which has had previous annual incarnations. The initial focus for Public Gesture centred on ideas of limitation and collaboration, both conceptually and logistically, yet as the process evolved, many of the artworks converged thematically, through investigation of topics with a personal resonance. As a result, there is a very human element underlying the works, which has emerged organically, and is the bond that unites the pieces.

Throughout the development of Public Gesture, there has been an inherent need to challenge constraints, push the boundaries and reconcile themes and subjects of concern, in order to produce an exhibition that tests the possibilities of collectivity. All of the voices contributing to the evolving dialogue are manifested via a holistic curatorial framework- one that contained moments of uncertainty- comprised of artworks, a publication, and a range of events in relation to the exhibition.

The foundation was formed on having a curatorial team. There was a necessity to sacrifice autonomy in this group dynamic, although through the process of collaboration, the associated components of this project began to emerge. It was important to forge a team identity that had a shared objective, yet to maintain an open and inclusive forum. The importance of mediating curatorial decisions to the artists involved was part of an ongoing dialogue that incorporated their requests, concerns and identities. A progressive discussion related to positioning artworks was fundamental in allowing the recognition of individuality, and also for artworks to thrive in conjunction with other pieces in the gallery space. The social nature of working collaboratively impacted unconsciously on everyone involved, and played a significant part in how the exhibition was implemented. The group support in nurturing talent, and distinguishing points of merit in everyone's practice, contributed largely to the successful resolution of Public Gesture.

It could be argued that the most important collaboration in any exhibition is with the viewer. Marcel Duchamp maintained that the viewer is significantly involved in the creative act. By interrogating and interpreting the artwork, they are responsible for producing art's meaning, and according to Duchamp, half of the work. The artist investigates a set of propositions, culminating in a resolved piece, yet the final conclusion rests with the viewer. It is this act which consolidates the process of collaboration. Further examination of this premise can be taken into account when considering the viewer's position on evaluating an exhibition in its entirety. The notion that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts is central to the philosophy of group shows. Each artwork asserts a unique authority, but when care is taken to contextualise each piece in a collective setting, the effect is far more powerful. Deliberate strategies- to ally works through structure, common properties and the ensuing patterns that materialise as a result of this approach- serve to emphasise the strength in unity.

In concurrence with the curatorial team, the artists have undertaken various strategies to respond to the space, using both marginal and palpable features of the gallery to display their work. There is a deliberate ploy to engage and enhance the viewer's experience in their surroundings, by connecting artworks on the interior and exterior of the building, and creating a relationship between the main space, the overhanging mezzanine, and the adjoining cube gallery.

Given the subjective and arbitrary nature of art, the ability to distinguish the beauty of individual pieces and to reassess the work in tandem with other artworks, as part of a contained exhibition, is a significant part of the process. This exhibition encompasses a diverse body of work that is triumphant in responding to its location, and succeeds in opening up a discourse on negotiating the limitations imposed by working collectively in a pre-determined space.

Public Gesture has been inventive, challenging, experimental, insightful, inspirational and an enormous pleasure to have been involved in developing. The curator Walter Hopps once said "The closest analogy to installing a museum exhibition is conducting a symphony orchestra," in which case, Beethoven's Symphony No. 9, is metaphorically echoing throughout the gallery.

Rowan Sexton is an independent curator based in Dublin. She has previously worked in IMMA, the National Gallery and the Hugh Lane.

Public Gesture

The LAB, Dublin, 14 – 19 May 2011

Public Gesture is an exhibition of projects by students of the MA in Visual Arts Practices (MAVIS) at IADT. Public Gesture opens from 6:00 – 8:00pm Friday 13 May 2011, and continues from 10:00am – 5:00pm Saturday 14 May – Thursday 19 May 2011 (closed on Sunday). The exhibition includes new work by Rachael Agnew, Debora Ando, Clare-Louise Bligh, Terence Erraught, Aoife Flynn, Jessica Conway, Trish McAdam, Siobhán McDonald & Rachael Gilbourne, Ann Murphy, Vukasin Nedeljkovic, Jane Queally, Sarah Roche and Dorothy Smith. Public Gesture is curated by Rosie Lynch, Seán O Sullivan, Rowan Sexton and Kate Strain.

Rachael Agnew *The Possibility of Microscopic Happenings* Through my practice I am trying to comprehend the variety of structures at different scales of life. Within the limits of the gallery walls, I am attempting to visualise some of the invisible structures and activities only seen through a microscope of my thoughts. There are constant atomic activities which surround us. My work addresses the visuality of what this constant flux looks like at any given moment. It is situated between the boundaries of chaos and order, known and unknown, visible and invisible. The installation is a representation of my thoughts on the possible structural activities within this space.

Debora Ando *How to project it* The action will take place on a daily basis from the beginning to the end of the show but will not be scheduled for the public to spectate, as Ando's intention is to remain anonymous during the process. She will document each stage of the project, and at the end intends to have a sequence of images reflecting the process. The materials used: masking tape and/or coloured tape. The length of the lines projected outside the LAB are based on the measures on the building.

Anonymous *Have you signed the Ai Weiwei release petition? If not, why not?* A 30 second, animation loop, aimed at advertising a petition for the release of the internationally acclaimed Chinese artist, Ai Weiwei on <http://www.change.org/>. The petition, started by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, is in response to the detention, on April 3rd 2011, of Ai. His whereabouts remain unknown and he has been denied due process under Chinese law. A MAVIS student created this as a public gesture. It will be screened at the exhibition and made available on youtube as a copyright free download for use by others wishing to advertise/support this petition.

Clare-Louise Bligh *Baba Yaga* This work explores the tenuous place between anxiety, comfort and fear of inner and outer worlds. Through dipping into the well of archaic imagery that has been embedded in the human psyche from mythology and story, I hope to create a vehicle of estrangement that leads the viewer through the uncanny connections between the dream world and the physical world.

Jessica Conway Ehmm...

Terence Erraught The male pushes his sweaty body up to the window's stern, firm unbluffing pane. The pane, unreacting, initiates the man's curiosity as his exhaled breath begins to steam up his view. A difference between the two. The heat of the interior, exaggerating the condensation, and his sense of wanting to be inside...

Aoife Flynn My current research takes as its starting point the narrative of science fiction, opening up imaginary worlds and alternative spaces where different social, political and personal possibilities can be explored. This installation investigates the claims made by Walter Benjamin when discussing contemporary existence as a spiraling series of technological advances, turned to waste by its own obsolescence.

Siobhan McDonald & Rachael Gilbourne *826* is an inky black score written by Siobhán McDonald and Rachael Gilbourne. Fifteen metres long, it was composed on March 16, 2011, at Killaun Bogland Reserve, County Offaly. The score seeks to unravel and converge a layered awareness of this place, this repository of deep time; to unfold a distilled sense of being. For Public Gesture, McDonald and Gilbourne have reframed the aesthetic form of the piece, condensing its textual elements into a single music sheet. *826* sits in The LAB Gallery in silence, a silence that is waiting, ready to make the inaudible, audible. The piece will return to the Killaun Bogland Reserve, to be performed live by cello and flute on June 18, 2011.

Ann Murphy *Oxymoron* "Etymology: From the Greek, oxus/sharp, môros/dull." Responding to site and space, this work is concerned with polarities and oppositions, such as order/disorder, freedom/constraint, compression/expansion, and the creative possibilities of paradox. It investigates materiality, individual perception, the visual, and the sensory, as having the potential for making meaning outside/beyond language.

Vukasin Nedeljkovic *My Dear Son* The Railway hostel, an accommodation centre for asylum seekers was closed in the summer of 2009 after operating for more than 5 years. The people who lived there are gone but their children have left their traces – drawings on the building of the hostel, their memories, pains, anxieties, fears and hopes. The hostel (hotel) is for sale now as a 23 bedroom property. The footprints of the cultures and community that existed for many years are being erased at this moment in time.

Jane Queally *Polaroid Series* This work involves an experimental approach in considering the representation of the photographic image as document, in relation to the recent earthquake, tsunami and nuclear explosion in Japan on 11th March 2011. Through the manipulation of mass media imagery I play with the creation of a hybrid image which examines notions of truth and fiction. The resulting images are a series of polaroids which attest to an *eye witness account*.

Sarah Roche *Dark Night (Cantata for an Observatory)* What is the place of non-quantifiable, non-linear kinds of knowledge in contemporary society? I'm interested in types of knowledge that can't be contained in thought alone, and only become fully known to us through 'doing', such as artmaking and singing. I'm exploring the idea of dark matter – unknown matter that makes up 80–90% of the universe - as an analogy for this kind of knowledge. This converges with my interest in the idea of darkness and 'unknowing' as used in the writings of St. John of the Cross.

Dorothy Smith *Private Lives* explores the places and spaces of the built environment; home, with its physical manifestations, the markings of the passage of time, its confining yet supportive structure; and neighbourhood, its private lives and public signs.

