Critical Approaches to Arts-based Research

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ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

Critical Approaches to Arts-Based Research

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THEME   Arts based research (ABR), its products, processes and critical theorising have come a long way in recent times. Nuanced distinctions indicate the development of the field, as arts-informed research, arts-based research, practice-led research, applied research, and creative participatory action research all claim different relationships with the art and criticality present in such innovative scholarship. Finally, it seems, we are moving away from a defensive stance regarding arts based research and its 'validity', and toward a celebration of this proliferation of diverse ways of knowing, theorising and doing research. This 'coming of age' is evident in this special issue, which urges readers to move beyond binarised notions of scientific 'versus' arts based research that still at times dominates academic research environments and conversations, and outmoded practice/theory divides. For we co-editors and for the authors here, theorising is indeed a creative practice, and goes hand-in-hand with the epistemological and ontological potential of arts-making methods. This issue celebrates the opening of new doors in theorising innovative arts based research from a range of global contexts, theoretical and epistemological frameworks, and inter/disciplines. We avoid any attempt to codify or limit the parameters of what contemporary arts based research is or can be. Indeed, we seek the opposite: to highlight its ever-expanding possibilities.

The essays here aim to encourage critical analysis and dialogue about the objects and subjects of arts based research for contemporary times, poststructuralist, posthuman and other critical approaches to arts based research, and the interdisciplinary application of performative and practice-led research in transferable methodological models. We are pleased to be able to include digital assets with many of the articles in this special issue. Indeed, the layered and multimodal complexity of arts based 'outputs' or artefacts is one of its rich distinguishing features, and it requires commitment from editors and publishers to not always demand a 'reduction' back into text-based forms, a diminishment of many forms of ABR. For this we thank the UNESCO editorial and production team, and hope you enjoy this contribution to the critical development of the arts based research field.

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OBSERVATORY

Cultural Graffiti in London:
Singing Life into Exhibitions and Embodying the Digital Document

AUTHOR

Helen Gilbert and **J.D. Phillipson**
in dialogue with
Peter Morin

ABSTRACT

Testing the confines of scientific reporting, this account of a practice-based contemporary art intervention explores the challenges and opportunities presented by creating and documenting live performance, translating it into a format suitable for installation at an exhibition of indigenous performance and subsequently developing an interactive digital version. The investigation is grounded in Nicholas Bourriaud's theory of relational aesthetics and attuned to indigenous epistemologies that understand objects and places as having agency. Considering the use of gallery-based installations to convey the ephemeral, relational and participatory art form of performance, our report analyses an experiment in curatorial practices that aimed to make interventions 'immediate' for an audience that had not witnessed their iteration first-hand. We assess the implications of developing a site-based postcolonial work, Peter Morin's *Cultural Graffiti in London* (2013), at the historical centre of imperialism, and argue that the locations of the encounters and interactions constituting the project extend to the very firmament of the city itself.

Working in dialogue with scholars and artists for more than 20 years, **Helen Gilbert** has followed a passionate interest in the aesthetics and politics of cross-cultural engagement. She has directed and designed experimental theatre projects in Australian universities and is internationally known for her ground-breaking research in postcolonial theory and indigenous performance studies.

Trained in theatre and film production, **J.D. Phillipson** explores ways that particular forms of indigeneity are emerging as distinct global brands while simultaneously becoming part of a new mainstream. She is alert to the power of design in positioning subjects, shaping space and mediating artistic encounters.

Peter Morin produces art that honours his home and the stories, words and songs of his people from the traditional territory of the Tahltan Nation. His work animates the histories of indigenous objects and connects with the ancestors of these objects through different modes of performance: song, stand-up comedy and oration. His art is a record of his ongoing process of understanding and practising his culture and language. His voice is Tahltan. It comes from the land.

INTRODUCTION / PURPOSE

It began as afterthought, almost a throwaway line in a grant application to the European Research Council, written unobtrusively in the proposed outputs section: '... and, possibly, an exhibition'. When funding came (in spades) for the umbrella project, Indigeneity in the Contemporary World (ICW), [1] *we were 'charged' with a task that probably only happens once in a research lifetime: staging a major exhibition of indigenous performance in London. Charged: entrusted, energised, stimulated, filled. Charged: tense, causing strong feelings or opinions ... inherently political?*

With an essentially open brief, it wasn't hard to identify the material 'stuff' that might make up our installations. Prominent on the list were photos, videos and sound recordings that could stand as the fragmentary 'remains' of the indigenous performances we'd researched. Some striking objects had also caught our eye: gourds etched with storylines by a Quechua filmmaker, costumes fashioned for Aboriginal stilt dancers, a giant kite flown at Day of the Dead festivities in Guatemala and puppets made from recycled paper and plastics by South African schoolchildren. The logic of the collage would draw all these fragments together around the theme of sustainability. The broader challenge, as we saw it, was to make manifest the ways in which performance can endure across different cultures and art forms.

We also needed to somehow root the exhibition in London, a city inclined to forget its imperial past.

– HG

Essentially, we aimed to reach beyond the archival functions of 'conservation, categorization, and restoration' that tend to prevail in mainstream exhibitions (Bal 2010, p. 9), and towards indigenous notions of sustainable art as a collective social praxis. Seeing no good reason to use performance in a didactic demonstration of our project's findings, we chose to present indigenous performance-making in an artistic register and so focused on questions that could open a window on that particular creative process:

- What material means and curatorial methods would make specific indigenous performances 'present' (at some level) to an audience that had not witnessed their iteration first-hand?

- How might our exhibition emerge from and fit into London's physical and cultural strata, historically and artistically, other than as a fleeting marker of lives lived elsewhere?

- Which perceptible characteristics of the artworks on display would translate from live performance to gallery-based exhibition and then to a digital platform?

While these questions touched on enduring debates in (Western) performance theory – about liveness, presence, the archive and spectatorship, for instance – they were driven by pragmatic concerns. We needed to craft an exhibition with popular appeal so as to engage a broad range of publics with indigenous work. This would honour the artists' social and activist agendas, including a desire to 'speak' on an international stage as part of a global citizenry. At the same time, the exhibition had to stand as a product of our research and a valid platform for its dissemination. Our insights into the nature and function

of performance, and its curation in an intercultural context, would develop in the thickness of experience and through dialogues with the artists concerned. In keeping with ideas of a responsive ecology of artistic praxis, we named the exhibition *EcoCentrix: Indigenous Arts, Sustainable Acts* and added the byline: 'Performance and provocation in our times'.

MATERIALS (INSPIRING THEORIES)

Although only a little of the literature we had examined over the years of the ICW project seemed to bear directly on the practical challenges that confronted us, we amassed articles, books and reports about exhibition practices, almost as a bulwark against failure. In museum studies, there was a surfeit of information on the ways in which indigenous objects have been exhibited, along with some insightful theorising about their performativity, [2] but often only scant reference to contemporary indigenous performance as a self-conscious artistic activity. We took from the 'new museology' – and critiques of the old – a reminder of the necessity to find active ways to engage spectators as stakeholders in our event, and a familiar litany of imperialist sins to avoid. [3] One of the most promising theoretical leads in this discipline was Nicholas Thomas's argument that experimentation is fundamental to the new museum method so that, ideally, curation is a less rational process than mere selection, one involving 'chance and surprise, and perhaps also the fraught exposure of something enigmatic or troubling' (2011, p. 311). James Clifford's concept of museums as 'contact zones' (extending Mary Louise Pratt's work) suggested that such experimentation should be grounded in an awareness of the improvised, interactive dimensions of cross-cultural contact, past and present (1997, p. 192), but specific clues on exhibiting performance as such remained elusive.

and towards cultural education enacted through democratic, community-minded, participatory activities. Among the many books that evidence this shift, edited collections by Karp, Kreamer and Levine (1992) and Golding and Modest (2013) offer nuanced accounts of the relationships between museums and their communities.

Our home discipline, performance studies, offered a wealth of insight into the embodied actions (and audiences) gathered under its capacious umbrella, but in this field 'exhibition' tends to evoke that which performance is not. Despite the lessons of two decades of debate about the status and value of recorded documentation (the main raw material for our installations), we were plagued by Peggy Phelan's well-known injunction against archiving what is understood to be quintessentially live: 'to the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction, it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology' (1993, p. 146). Our particular exhibition theme seemed to complicate the issue, at least in the world of European arts praxis, where the label of anthropology is too easily attached to indigenous work. We resisted this ascription, not only because it was fundamentally at odds with our vision for the exhibition and the audiences we aimed to attract, but also because it undermined the artistic achievements of the performance-makers involved.

Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of 'relational aesthetics', premised on the notion that contemporary 'art is a state of encounter' (2002, p. 18), offered a framework for thinking about ways in which the records/remains we wanted to exhibit could simultaneously index past events and initiate new aesthetic encounters. These encounters would become building blocks of an artistic assemblage, the exhibition, in and through which performance might not only endure but also take root in a new cultural space. In Bourriaud's formulation, 'what [the artist] produces, first and foremost, [are] relations between people and the world, by way of aesthetic objects' (2002, p. 42). Such relations, he argues, intensify with urbanisation. Drawing directly from Althusser's claim that the city is constituted by 'a state of encounter ... imposed on people' (1996, p. 185; original emphasis), Bourriaud sees its artistic substrate as emerging through a dynamic network of interactions, human and non-human:

> [The city] is the tangible symbol and historical setting of the state of society … . Once raised to the power of an absolute rule of civilisation, this system of intensive encounters has ended up producing linked artistic practices: an art form where the substrate is formed by intersubjectivity, and which takes being-together as a central theme, the "encounter" between beholder and picture, and the collective elaboration of meaning. (2002, p. 15)

Relational aesthetics, Bourriaud adds, is not a theory of art but of form, where form, defined as a 'lasting encounter', comes into being from the random meeting of two hitherto parallel elements that 'set' (like ice sets) on one another (2002, p. 19).

With Bourriaud's concepts in mind, we began to imagine how indigenous encounters with/in London, past, present and future, might be embedded in the city's artistic substrate. The thousands of artefacts that swell the galleries and storage vaults of museum collections in this erstwhile colonial metropolis are only the most obvious signs of such encounters. We thought about the performers who had come to London from the mid-nineteenth century as part of ethnological exhibitions and Wild West shows, about the contemporary indigenous artists who fleetingly (and too rarely) grace the city's international festival stages, and about Ngāti Rānana, a local group of Māori and Pasifikan performance-makers who constitute London's most visible diaspora of indigenous peoples. The city's architectural and physical features were never far from our discussions. What traces did they contain of the indigenous denizens who had passed through or inhabited this urban hub, however briefly? How might these traces speak, across time, of those subaltern subjects swept along in the global flows of people, goods and ideas instantiated by European modernity?

To connect our exhibition to such encounters, and to London as the material site of their unfolding, made artistic and ideological sense. We were reaching towards indigenous notions of

sustainability, which encompass not only the conservation of natural environments and resources but also the vitalisation of social memory. In this context, relational aesthetics seemed in keeping with indigenous knowledge systems as 'living, relational schemas' based on embodied apprehension of the world and an ongoing connection to place/country (Moreton-Robinson and Walter 2009, p. 3). If visitors to *EcoCentrix* could be enticed into states of active encounter with the materials on show, the event would meet one of its key objectives: to present indigenous performance as both contemporary and enduring. The exhibits we had selected offered rich opportunities for interactive curation. What we lacked was an artistic anchor, forged with an indigenous perspective, that might convey the exhibition's particular resonance in the historical substrate of the place in which it would appear. The ICW project had previously supported researchers in residence to augment its multicultural team – why not an artist?

METHODS

1. Commission and facilitate a performance work based on indigenous knowledges and created in response to London's cultural, architectural and physical landscape.

2. Document the performance and the artist's reflections on its public presentation using photos, video images, sound recordings, interviews and social media.

3. Use the documentary remains of the commissioned artwork to create an installation in a group exhibition of indigenous performance.

4. Transfer elements of the installation from the live exhibition into a digital, archival version accessible to a broad range of publics.

5. Analyse the performance-making and curatorial processes at issue, particularly in terms of their potential to illuminate the dynamics of social memory in the aftermath of imperialism.

DESCRIPTION OF THE EXPERIMENT

STAGE 1: PETER MORIN LEAVES CULTURAL GRAFFITI IN LONDON

I muster the ICW team in the shadow of Wellington's Arch and we discuss the day's interventions. The artist, Peter Morin, plans to sing Tahltan songs to Buckingham Palace and the Princess Diana Memorial Fountain in Hyde Park. This isn't the first of his interventions but it is the day where we have the largest documentary team to accompany him: Rose Harriman with local London knowledge and maps, Charlotte Gleghorn with audio recording equipment, Sergio Huarcaya with video camera, and Dylan Robinson with digital SLR camera. I am poised and ready to take on anything, carrying gear, speaking with interested passersby or explaining our actions to authorities. I sense an air of curiosity and apprehension among us while we walk along. We focus on the familiar or the practical. We do not know how our roles as witnesses will affect us. Just before we arrive at our destination, Peter stops and puts on his regalia – ceremonial attire re-imagined for subversive acts. His identity as exotic other is now emblazoned upon him. Our presence as a documentary crew situates him as a visual commodity. Yet assessing the value of this positioning is difficult. Are we increasing or undermining the legitimacy of the artist and his project?

– JDP

For First Peoples in the Pacific Northwest region of Canada, the act of singing is 'not solely a form of entertainment, or an aesthetic experience. Songs have the power to do things in the world'. They 'convey knowledge about the natural and spirit worlds,

they are oral records of family and community history, and they reproach leaders for not upholding their responsibilities toward their communities'. In some instances, 'songs act as records of land-title, as law', or as modes and markers of belonging to specific places. In other cases, 'songs are used to heal'. [4] As affective, and often interactive, performances, they also foster sociality in ways that help to build a distinctive indigenous public sphere (see Dueck 2013). When Tahltan artist Peter Morin staged a series of performance interventions around London in June and July 2013, songs from his homeland were his chosen medium. He visited and sang to British landmarks, including the Houses of Parliament, Buckingham Palace, and Big Ben; indigenous monuments such as Pocahontas' gravesite and Kwakwaka'wakw carver Mungo Martin's Totem Pole in Great Windsor Park; and contemporary pilgrimage sites like the Princess Diana Memorial Fountain in Hyde Park and streets featuring iconic graffiti by Banksy. Morin envisioned these performances not as musical entertainment for audiences, but as a form of communication with historical figures, both colonial and indigenous.

the tower of london was a dream. understanding how the crown jewels and the monarchy influence indigenous ways of knowing, it's all a dream until you stand, actually stand there and sing. ... and singing the song is also acknowledging this bloody history, and also resource extraction, this creation of this place. [5]

– PM (2013b)

Morin recognises that the sites of these monuments are far from neutral zones. As Mechtild Widrich argues, monuments perform, provoking viewers to think about the past and often involving 'the audience in a social bond intended to instil historical consciousness' (2014, p. 1–2). Using his voice to 'tag' colonial monuments, Morin's songs took the form of 'cultural graffiti'. This sonic rebellion against the hegemonic exercise of colonial power involved an assertion of cultural resilience that often ended with the statement, 'we are still here'. At Parliament,

Morin stood, pressed against the stones of the building, and sang into the joints between its carved embellishments and monolithic pilasters. The lingering song, an aural interference legible only to a small band of witnesses, aimed to undermine and destabilise the historical foundations of the mistreatment of First Nations Canadians. Curiously opaque to passersby, the work produced an intense experience for the artist and provoked thoughtful appreciation from the documentary team privy to his conceptual approach.

buckingham palace. thousands of people. set up the blanket. put on your armour. sing the song. the song that is a tahltan river rushing inside of me. the drum speaks. it says 'this drum supports indigenous voice'. the drum beats are bullets. does anyone know this? (only me). sing the song. fall down and sing the song into the land. drum and sing around the monument. overheard conversations: 1. i think he thinks he's an indian 2. shhh. this is an indigenous performance. i also hear applause.

– PM (2013c)

Fig. 1
The public looks on (or doesn't) at Peter Morin's Cultural Graffiti in London, live at Buckingham Palace, 2013. Photos: Dylan Robinson.

Morin drummed and sang as he walked amongst the tourists at Buckingham Palace and Canada Gate. As the sites of many earlier indigenous people's visits, these prominent formal zones of royal display and habitation served as appropriate locales to recognise and honour indigenous ancestors. Laying prostrate and singing into the ground, Morin delivered the sound into

fissures and cracks where resonances could remain as graffiti. A few people paused to watch, but when the artist was not apparently 'doing anything much', the impromptu, would-be audiences dispersed and their attention reverted to the palace. For this intervention, Morin wore a traditional button blanket he had crafted specifically for his London performances, hand-made mukluks and a cloth mask – a tightly tied black band into which he had cut eyeholes, subverting the customary victim status of the blindfolded figure. It was this mask that particularly unsettled a watching police officer on alert for violent protestors or even terrorists. Yet, Morin had finished circling the road's central monument and singing to the ground in front of the palace before he was stopped as he attempted to cross the road away from the site.

I step quickly between the artist and the police officer and start talking. Peter's acts (and his attire) are important aspects of Tahltan culture. I compare him to thousands of other tourists, but the officer is not yet convinced. The artist is interested in genealogical research; he needs to appear in his regalia to re-connect with his ancestors, I explain. Have you seen that television program, 'Who Do You Think You Are?' Situating the unconventional dress and behaviour as quaint indigenous cultural practices is expedient. It reduces the importance of Peter's work, but we do not have a license for performance. I pause in my explanatory chatter and look earnestly at the police officer. He allows us to depart and even to continue the intervention – with the caveat that it should be well out of his line of sight.

– JDP

Fig. 2
Words with the police during Peter Morin's Cultural Graffiti in London, live at Buckingham Palace, 2013. Photos: Dylan Robinson.

6
See, for instance, Henri Lefebvre (1991) and Edward Casey (1993) and, more recently, Tim Ingold (2000).

7
Morin also performed songs to the ancient monuments at Stonehenge, an experience he described as especially moving in terms of connecting with indigenous spirits of place.

In Bourriaud's construction, artworks 'get elements held apart to meet' (2002, p. 20). Morin likewise sees the role of an artist as to 'engineer the meeting of materials' (2013a). His 'Cultural Graffiti' performances engineer the meeting of a range of tangible and intangible elements across metaphoric and physical registers. According to many indigenous epistemologies, apparently inanimate objects are alive in some way and artworks are imbued with a spiritual existence during their creation. Similarly, space is 'waiting' for an occasion to be initiated by people, existing not in stasis but in a self-perpetuating reference to its own past, present and future (a view now shared widely in disciplines such as cultural geography. [6]) By interacting with a monument in a particular place, visitors may come into contact with both the physical elements of the space and the artefact, and the spirits within them. Morin explains that 'engaging with [monuments] from that knowledge production framework becomes quite serious, and a little bit overwhelming ' (2013b). [7]

For Morin, the act of creating graffiti is 'a reassurance of agency', questioning who has power and how power is maintained (2013b). His invisible sonic graffiti has added potency: it resists removal and endures in the pores of the stones, pavements, wood and soil into which it is delivered. Intangibility insures its survival. There can be no forced erasure or pre-emptive destruction of the work's intent. At some sites, Morin's graffiti also enacted a form of 'nation-to-nation' (Morin, 2013a; Robinson, 2013) contact with ancestors. He explained that Pocahontas's story

'resonates' with him because she is robbed of the complexity and inter-subjectivity of her indigenous identity by a colonial project that reduces her to the exotic agent of John Smith (2013b). Morin works to give back to the spirit of Pocahontas things that have been stolen from her: songs and messages from her descendants, the recognition and respect of her people, and the honour titles of 'Aunty' and 'Grandma' as they are used in indigenous communities.

i got worried that nobody visits her, nobody goes to sing to her. ... so here she is, one of our people. whatever her story has become, i imagine her loneliness. ... i felt like the cultural graffiti transformed into company, a lasting vibration, or something, a lasting energy, a lasting act. understanding that her spirit is there, trying to talk directly to her spirit. ... leaving the song in the land ... exactly where the monument meets the ground, because i don't know where she's buried. they lost her grave; they don't know where she's buried.

– PM (2013b)

Morin's song interventions also emphasised the contemporaneity of indigenous initiatives in art (and politics) and extended to sites connected to pop culture icons. Singing at the Princess Diana Memorial Fountain served in part as an errand for his mother and aunts who felt as if they knew the global celebrity. This singing affirms support for 'the people's princess' from an unexpected group: First Nations Canadians who empathised with her difficult negotiation with monarchical power, her image appropriation, her desire to be acknowledged but retain her privacy and dignity, and her struggles with the general challenges of modern life. In a different manner, but from a similarly populist perspective, Morin's visits to Banksy graffiti sites allowed an immediate comparison between the two artists' media and techniques. Banksy's graffiti is uniquely positioned in a liminal space between the anti-establishment, anti-social, illegal world of criminal damage and the contemporary art world that legitimates his work instead of denouncing it as

vandalism. [8] Overtly political, Banksy depicts the margins and the marginalised in humorous ways designed to expose social inequities. Morin's respect for this kind of provocation is evident in his gifts of songs at several Banksy sites, yet his own approach works to avoid producing art objects that could be appropriated as reified commodities. What remains of Morin's graffiti circulates in the reverberations of resonance, the memories of the witnesses present, and the documentary fragments collected.

While the main 'audience' for these performances was the site of the song – the ground, the stones, the artwork, the traces of ancestors remaining – Morin felt it was important to include witnesses to his work. The immediate role of these individuals was to document the performances and support the artist by negotiating the everyday practical challenges of working in London's public spaces. Amid carrying regalia, wayfinding and dealing with authorities, the witnesses' (unspoken) task was to attend – to be there and to pay attention – in a sensory, embodied and imaginative way. As Bourriaud suggests, 'the foundation of artistic experience is *the joint presence of beholders in front of the work*, be this work effective or symbolic' (2002: 57; original emphasis). Morin's witnesses serve as keepers of a collective memory of his activations of indigenous presences in contemporary London.

Although I deliberately set an open brief for Peter's commission, his 'cultural graffiti' comes as a surprise. Somehow I expected he would craft tangible objects that might both speak of his London performance/s (and his other métier as a visual artist) and easily migrate to the exhibition space. Nevertheless, I'm immediately taken with the graffiti concept and struck by its profundity despite the apparently simple enactments on which it rests. These sonic etchings give rise to a necessary theoretical investigation: what does it mean to make a physical mark through song? If the reverberations of sound remain indefinitely within the material substrate of the city, as Peter argues, can traces of his graffiti be read or sensed in any

Jace Weaver captures the essence of this trade in his notion of 'the red Atlantic', a metaphor for the little known but extensive trans–oceanic cultural exchanges through which indigenous Americans came to help shape European history (2014).

meaningful way by future visitors to the sites he has tagged? What political impact can this graffiti have when there's no visual symbol to recognise or remove? I mentally test the idea of sonic marks against Stephen Greenblatt's notion of 'resonance', which has been something of a touchstone for my thinking about the exhibition. For Greenblatt, resonance is 'the power of the displayed object to reach out beyond its formal boundaries to a larger world, to evoke in the viewer the complex, dynamic cultural forces from which it has emerged and for which it may be taken by a viewer to stand' (1991, p. 42). The test produces no verdict on the durability of Peter's work, but leads me to question Greenblatt's term. Etymologically at least, resonance is associated more closely with sound than vision. It is one of the distinctive ways in which objects and spaces speak. We experience resonance in temporal, spectral and spatial domains. In this sense, its unauthorised introduction is perhaps an act of vandalism.

–   *HG*

▶ DIGITAL VIDEO: 'THE ARTIST SINGS: PETER MORIN IN CONVERSATION'

STAGE 2: EXHIBITING THE DOCUMENTATION OF PERFORMANCE IN THE LIVE EXHIBITION

I turn up to the Bargehouse gallery at Oxo Tower Wharf on the Thames, midway along the walking route between the National Theatre, Southbank Centre and British Film Institute at one end and the Tate Modern Art Gallery and Shakespeare's Globe at the other. This location offers a legitimating prestige but also acknowledges an imperial past when the goods of the empire arrived along this important river route. [9] The situation seems ideal for an exhibition about indigenous performance and sustainability. The building inspires me. Its history is revealed in part through the layers of peeling paint and fallen plaster. The elegant decay of the raw warehouse gallery is in stark contrast to both the 'renewed' historical building

renovations and the modern architectural interventions that dominate the Southbank area. Spread over five floors, the rooms vary in size, each with its own unique character. I am already designing a layout in my head. In a gallery like this, we can move indigenous work out of its traditional framing in the anthropological/ethnographic mode and treat it as contemporary art.

– JDP

In both substance and operation, Morin's work within the gallery exhibition was dramatically different from his live performances. The audiences for the installation were the exhibition's visitors rather than the seemingly impassive monuments and places to which Morin had sung. Distanced from the locales of the artist's live interactions with the material substrate of the city, these audiences encountered his graffiti in forms mediated by digital photography, video, sound recordings and installation practice. To serve the artist's intention of leaving graffiti in London, we set out to produce a record of his mark-making that would register as art. In the live interventions we had witnessed, the art lay not in the musicality of the songs as such or in their recital for a human audience – indeed Morin's singing had been essentially a private act – but in the songs' transformation of the city's sites and monuments into vessels containing graffiti. An audio recording by itself would struggle to convey this kind of performativity to anyone lacking familiarity with the conventions of the Tahltan art form. The visual archive, by comparison, showed the artist in sensory relation with his material environment, suggesting more readily the encounters that had taken place. We decided to explore the synaesthetic possibilities of that visible relation by presenting an image-based installation, with sound, that could be legible within the exhibition as performance art. The exhibit was designed to test Bourriaud's assertion that the 'contemporary image is typified precisely by its generative power; it is no longer a trace (retroactive), but a programme (active)' (2002, p. 69–70). Could an installation of digital images provoke and surprise new witnesses one step removed from Morin's live performances?

i can't see the reactions because i'm there, so I get to see the documentation afterwards.... all these people are taking these pictures, like standing just far enough away and angling their phones, just far enough, so that they're like taking a picture where i'm not in the frame ... i have beads and buckskin on, and i'm here in England where that image of aboriginal, first nations people is popular. in some of the documentation you see a repeat of people really paying attention to what i'm doing. mostly it seems like avoidance, like i've become invisible.

– PM (2013b)

The installation developed alongside the exhibition design. Photographs documenting Morin's interventions stood out as the most evocative material from which to select our display. While the video footage, generally taken by a single hand-held camera, offered limited opportunities for editing into a cohesive exhibit, the photographs encompassed both long shots contextualising the artist's interactions with the monuments and close-ups conveying the intensity of his experience in the moments of singing. We arranged a selection of images as a photo essay that conveyed not only a sense of the artist's process of encountering the metropolis but also public reactions to his graffiti in progress. Images that showed the videographer and the documenting researchers in-situ were included to make our involvement in the interventions and the resulting installation transparent. What was displayed told a story of sorts, but one that invited viewers to ask questions and draw their own conclusions.

Fig. 3
Elements of the Photo Essay: Peter Morin's Cultural Graffiti in London, EcoCentrix exhibition 2013. Photos: Dylan Robinson.

Morin's playful approach to his subversive graffiti inspired us to incorporate a twenty-first century version of trompe l'oeil into the installation. In the series of 12 photographs, the eighth image was actually an edited video sequence of Morin singing. Beginning with what appeared to be a photographic still, the short video would unexpectedly move through the clip before returning to hold for a period on the establishing image. The video loop was constructed to repeat the sequence but hold the still for varying times, making it difficult even for an initiated viewer to anticipate when the image would begin to move. We loaded the video onto an iPad, printed the photographs the same size as its viewable screen area and framed all the images to match. The surprise element of the video along with the digital photography highlighted the contemporaneity of the artist and the co-presence of traditional song and regalia in the highly mediatised present of the cosmopolitan city.

Fig. 4
Concept design for display structure for Peter Morin's Cultural Graffiti in London, EcoCentrix exhibition 2013. Design: J.D. Phillipson.
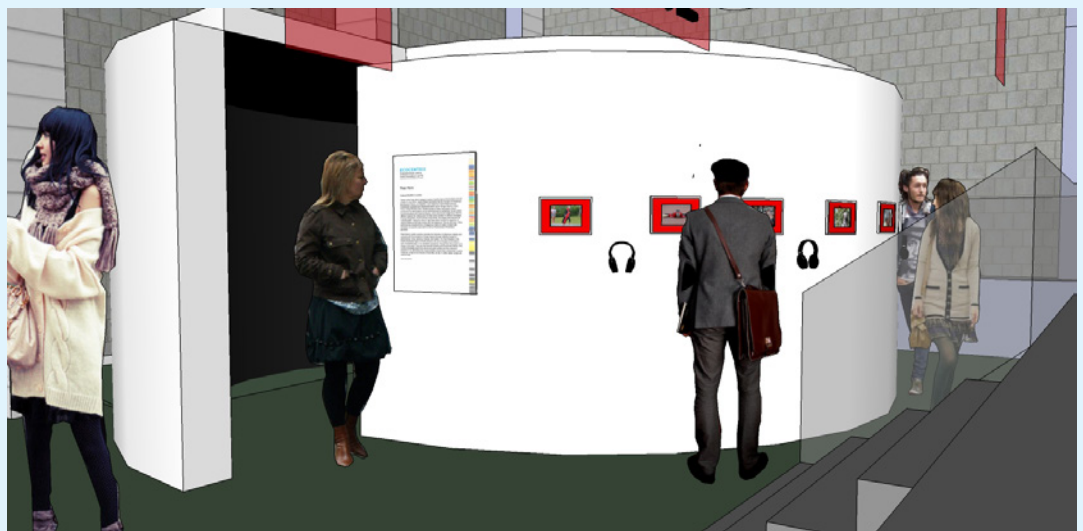
The trompe l'oeil effect required that the work be installed in an area which constrained the viewing distance for the images. Hanging the framed prints and video along a convex curve made scanning the photos all at once difficult and helped to preserve the surprise of the video. Sonic elements were layered in with headphones hung between pairs of prints. These reinforced the intimacy of the encounter by inviting individual visitors to listen to a number of audio segments: the sound of Morin's singing to the totem pole, an interview with the artist and wax cylinder recordings of Tahltan men and women singing, loaned from the James Teit archive (1911–1915) of the Canadian Museum of History. An introductory panel and captions contextualised the artist's actions but the installation was deliberately fragmentary.

▶ DIGITAL VIDEO: VIDEO RECORD OF THE EXHIBITION

Working within the conventions of the photo-essay helped us to resist the trap of documentary plenitude – the impulse to show and annotate the evidence in detail. The photos I selected were chosen in part for their aesthetic appeal but also for their ability to conjure imagined scenarios from our archive of Peter's project. I did not initially accord the photos themselves (especially in their form as digital files) the same kind of material presence as the monuments and sites they depicted. The images were merely temporal windows to moments in the interventions, indexical records I could curate to suggest the character and reach of Peter's graffiti, and even something of its synaesthetic feel. Yet, in Dani's design for the installation, its component materials came to register, to perform, in physical and spatial planes. They were asserting themselves as things in Paul Brown's terms, where thing 'names less an object than a particular subject-object relation' (2001: 4). Did this development bring us closer to the kind of resonance I was seeking? Thinking about Peter's work, I saw what was missing – or at least unstated – in Brown's theory: the idea, common in indigenous world views, that objects can have agency without having personhood. Could that explain the frisson in the uncanny movement of the image on the iPad?

Greenblatt argues that 'a resonant exhibition often pulls viewers away from the celebration of isolated objects and towards a series of implied, only half-visible relations and questions' (1991, p. 45). Rather than choosing photos that would simply manifest a scene, I'd reached intuitively for the ones that posed questions. 'Why is that man singing to the ground?', a three year-old asked when she saw the exhibit. Questions set the stage for a multiplicity of encounters to emerge; they are invitations to visitors to bridge the gaps between the episodes and observations we'd shared in the exhibit. Did our careful layering of fragmentary 'things' convey the essence, the spirit, of Peter's interventions? In some ways, an invitation is a precarious curatorial strategy, but it's one that performance should teach us to trust.

– HG

STAGE 3: EXHIBITING THE DOCUMENTATION OF THE PERFORMANCE IN *ECOCENTRIX ONLINE*, A DIGITAL ARCHIVE/EXHIBITION

I am explaining to the web designer that we aim to incorporate a sense of the Bargehouse building as a structuring element as we move the exhibition into digital space. Can we provide opportunities for users to navigate through the building's unique industrial history and to discover installations that speak together in part because of their proximal relationships with one another? I realise that this is an unusual request, that art is generally situated in the 'neutral' space of a cyber gallery. But when is any space (cyber or otherwise) neutral? Our goal is to make visible the positioning choices we made in the live exhibition. These are elements of active curation and should be subject to scrutiny. There is a brief pause and then a quiet reply: 'I don't know how to do that yet. I'll have a think about it and play around a bit'. Our practice-based research is necessitating his. He's interested in discovering new approaches to his own art.

I have one small thing to add: we also want to design collaboratively with him a series of interactive installations to provoke new

encounters between users and the digital artworks. The articulation of these interactive exhibits must capitalise on the strengths and opportunities of the website framework and his canny computer programming. The pause is longer this time. He draws in a breath. 'Okay', he says, and I know that we have commissioned the right designer.

– JDP

In translating the live exhibition into an interactive online platform, the emphasis has remained on the provocation of unique encounters between viewers (now remotely connected through the internet) and the artworks (now digitised in a variety of ways). Rather than adopting a formulaic process whereby each artwork is allocated a standard number of digital images, *EcoCentrix Online* approaches each work individually in presenting its key elements. Several exhibits are treated to an interactive re-presentation sympathetic to the original but encompassing perspectives or features enabled by the newly digitised format. The website supports the development of communities of viewers, not only by message boards and comment streams but also by integrating opportunities to choose feedback words to describe encounters with artworks. These words, in turn, are displayed in a communally created data visualisation that evolves to incorporate new contributions, providing a rich repository of cyber viewers' [10] experiences.

In the case of 'Cultural Graffiti in London', digitisation has proceeded along two distinct routes. A digital version of the photo essay, including the video segment and access to the audio elements, is layered onto a photographic representation of the Bargehouse's interior. This design emphasises the work's containment within the structural frame of the building, adding a sense of intimacy often absent from virtual galleries. The viewer's initial experience of the artwork is essentially private, unlike in the live exhibition where an encounter with the installation could be observed by other people. In this

reconfigured version of exhibition space, where the website user actively selects images and audio elements, the installation works to provoke a different engagement from that achieved in the live event. Yet, despite the apparent intimacy of the digital encounter, it is two steps removed from Morin's originating acts of sonic graffiti. The sense that the primary audience for the work was found in the earth and stones of the locations themselves is greatly reduced and the role of 'witness' is now assigned, in some ways, to the remote website user whose personal choices in navigating the exhibit makes him/her complicit in its unfolding. Such willing activity allows the installation to be experienced as 'contemporaneous' however distant its origin (see Auslander 2012, p. 8). This preserves the immediacy of the artist's work and aims to increase its impact. We are conscious, however, that virtual co-presence comes with a different sense of spatiality.

Fig. 5
Concept design for website page, EcoCentrix Online 2014. Design: Bill Mulholland.
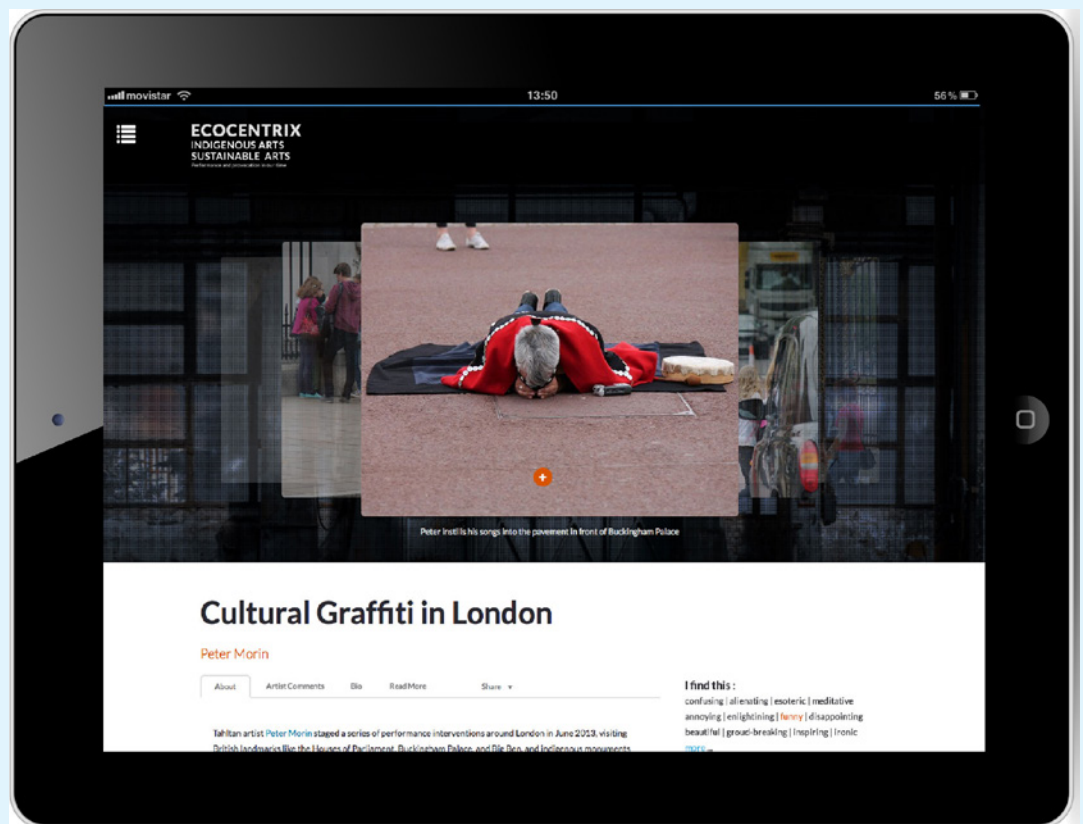
AUDIO COMPONENTS OF PHOTO ESSAY

▶ PETER MORIN SINGS TO BUCKINGHAM PALACE

▶ SONIC GRAFFITI AT PRINCESS DIANA MEMORIAL

▶ SONGS TO THE TOTEM POLE AT GREAT WINDSOR PARK

i wonder what the elders would say about this small gathering in cyberspace. there is no land in cyberspace and the elders are always talking about the land. ... by taking the time to walk on the land, you are participating in the history of ideas ... which continues to inform the survival of knowledge in your community. ... wherever you go on the land and how you choose to articulate this information contributes to this collective knowledge. there may not be land but there is definitely space in a website.

– PM (2009)

The second route to digitising Morin's interventions works to situate the performances in the city of London. The sites of his graffiti, and many others of indigenous significance, are incorporated onto an interactive map that can be 'clicked' for additional information about what happened at each location. The map invites active embodiment of the witness role. In London, website users can access the map on smartphones and other mobile devices to walk between sites and guide themselves to first hand views of the locations where the graffiti was applied. For those outside of the city, Google Maps and Street View offer a digital means to explore the locations virtually and to experience a 'walk' towards or between sites. The collapsing of time and distance made possible by these technologies, though unimaginable until recently in post-Enlightenment Western philosophies, seems consonant with the notion of a longstanding trans-indigenous ethos of spatial and temporal connectivity, realised in this instance through Morin's graffiti.

Fig. 6
Concept design for website page, Peter Morin's Walk, Indigenous London Interactive Map, EcoCentrix Online 2014. Design: Bill Mulholland.

When the first website mock-up was sent to us, I gazed at a photo of Peter in his regalia, suspended, beautifully, on my screen and worried that the images would supersede any deeper sense of the experience. Out on the London streets, that button blanket had become a shield, Peter's voice a current pulsing Tahltan songs into and through the urban landscape. What kind of presence could such acts, unfolding physically in their particular space and time, assert in the digital realm? Philip Auslander proposes that digital liveness emerges from our conscious (and physical) involvement with interactive platforms, not from any technological artefact or its operations (2012, p. 8). But how, in this medium, should we understand embodiment, beyond our own actions as website users?

Although we'd described the realisation process for EcoCentrix Online as 'iterative and experimental', I realized when the work began in earnest that I hadn't grasped the full measure of the digital platform, particularly in terms of its demand for creativity. Like the Bargehouse building, the online space from which the artworks emerge has become an extra character in the exhibition, though its precise nature eludes me. Is it a 'thing' as well as a portal or do we need

another term in keeping with the gallery's imminence, its coming-into-being in different configurations depending on the choices of the website user? I have come to appreciate that digital curation extends the capacity of performance to 'speak' in new ways, and to show how our embodied selves might be understood in an increasingly digital world. N. Katherine Hayles sees the body as an integral part of an 'information/material circuit that includes human and nonhuman components, silicon chips as well as organic tissue, bits of information as well as bits of flesh and bone' (1996, p. 12). With this circuitry in mind, I glimpse the interactive map coming into play as a different way of observing the artist's injunction to experience and remember the land.

– HG

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

As a praxis-based hermeneutics, relational aesthetics not only links the various phases of *Cultural Graffiti in London* but also draws attention to their specificities. Each stage of the project involved encounters with different sites (understood as particular constellations of human and non-human objects and technologies) that insistently asserted their influence on the performance-making at hand. The artist's live interventions may not have been immediately legible, but, conceivably, the very intimacy of such tactile, sonic interactions with the material substance of the city elicited questions about the performance's provenance. Who is that stranger? What is he doing? Why here? Certainly, Morin's unexpectedly physical connections with his (non-human) audiences – stones, ground, monuments – directed onlookers' attention to the sites receiving his graffiti and made their importance clear when little else was obvious. By contrast, the Bargehouse exhibition, oriented towards human encounters with the fragmentary record of Morin's work, contextualised his performances while remaining remote from the sites of

their unfolding. Visitors to *EcoCentrix Online* will generally be more remote yet in spatial and temporal terms, even as the medium they use to access the exhibit naturally inclines towards impressions of proximity. Where this digital platform enters the realm of fully embodied practice is in its invitation to users to visit, in person, the sites featured on the interactive London map – to attend with all their senses to the places where Morin's invisible etchings and/or other traces of indigenous presence may be apprehended.

Bourriaud argues that public art opens up a 'social interstice' or 'space in human relations', which encourages communication unfettered by everyday needs, potentially fostering 'new political and cultural designs' (2002: 16). This claim helps to focus our thinking about the exhibition's achievements, not just in terms of *Cultural Graffiti in London*, but also more broadly. Initially conceived as a commission of sorts, Morin's work proved to be a richer contribution than we had ever anticipated. It became a gift shaped by indigenous protocols in so far as it reached beyond the arena of interpersonal exchange to acknowledge a range of relationships relevant to the place and moment, while also establishing new connections mindful of the past and alert to the collective responsibilities that accompany its legacies. We aspired to communicate something of this connectivity in the curation and design of *EcoCentrix* as a live event, but did not attempt to gauge visitors' responses in any systematic way, opting instead to integrate opportunities for their spontaneous feedback through interactive exhibits (including a word-cloud activated by a mobile app) as well as workshops and ad-hoc discussions. A light-touch and largely open-ended questionnaire was also available to those interested in giving written feedback. Detailed surveys or obtrusive observations, we reasoned, were unlikely to deliver useful accounts of the kind of encounters we hoped to elicit. We were also wary of setting up expectations that might in fact bias visitors' responses or give the impression that the exhibition's main purpose was pedagogical. *EcoCentrix*

Online is designed to maintain the principle of integrated feedback through interactive exhibits and navigation tools, while also inviting discursive responses on discussion boards and comments pages that we hope will form part of larger digital communities focused on indigenous performance. In addition, the site makes use of Google analytics to harvest quantitative data, including information about the amount of time users spend on various pages, what paths they take through the digital platform, which installations invite the most comments and what users see last before leaving the gallery.

While the online site is yet to be fully tested, the feedback we gathered from the live exhibition, which attracted over 3000 visitors, suggests that the event did open up spaces for aesthetic encounters with indigenous performance. By far the most common response terms chosen for the word cloud were 'soulful', 'resonant', 'beautiful', 'thoughtful' and 'inviting', whereas critical descriptors only scored occasional hits. Written and oral feedback focused firstly on visitors' experiences of the installations and only afterwards, if at all, on what they had learnt. 'Felt really at ease wandering around this magical exhibition – it was so enlightening, so full of hope, inspiration', wrote one respondent. Others remarked on the breadth and high standards of the art, the fact that the exhibition's politics were 'articulated through cultural expression rather than polemic', how good it was to see indigenous work 'in a gallery context in London', and that they enjoyed the integration of such 'art with 21st century tech'. Many people registered the broad significance of the political and environmental issues raised by the artists, with one visitor summing up the theme as 'globalisation gripped by the indigenous dispossessed'. Likewise, reviews treated the exhibition as art that prompted both participation and reflection. By its second week, *EcoCentrix* was listed on the popular website, Broke in London, as one of the 'five best free things to do' (not just see) in the city.

In keeping with the exhibition's aim to draw out connections

The Victoria and Albert Museum is itself a site where important indigenous contributions to history and culture are commemorated. Displayed in the permanent collection in the theatre galleries is William Dawes' satirical painting, 'The Downfall of Shakespeare, Represented on a Modern Stage' (1763–5), which includes two indigenous visitors watching the decline of English drama from a box on the stage at Covent Garden Theatre. These figures are based on the Cherokee delegation of Ostenaco, Pouting Pigeon and Stalking Turkey, who visited King George III in 1762 amid negotiations to bolster support for the English against the French in North America. While

among the artworks around the theme of sustainability, both cultural and ecological, much of the feedback focused on the event as a whole rather than individual exhibits. Nevertheless, *Cultural Graffiti in London* was singled out on a number of questionnaires as particularly memorable and we ourselves saw many smiles and sudden second looks at the trompe l'oeil effect. Several visitors remarked in person that they enjoyed the playful surprise of the moving image embedded among the photographs as well as the provocation to imagine Tahltan songs lingering in various parts of the city. While such comments and observations can only be anecdotal as evidence, we interpret them as promising signs that the installation evoked experiences of the artist's presence and a sense of his performance as somehow enduring beyond its originary moment. These aesthetic engagements also seemed to make a space for new perspectives. For instance, two visitors, intrigued by the video's inclusion in the exhibit were surprised to learn that the Kwakwaka'wakw totem pole featuring as the site/audience of Morin's song rested in Great Windsor Park just outside London, not 'somewhere in America'. Indigenous peoples had not figured in their previous understandings of the city's history, neither in terms of trade, migration routes, diplomacy nor art. Morin's intervention seemed to open up the possibility of such interrelatedness; being indigenous and having ancestors in Britain were no longer mutually exclusive. States of active encounter with the materials on show were also evident in a test of *EcoCentrix Online* at the Victoria and Albert Museum in late 2014 where university students said they were surprised and delighted to navigate through an exhibition of contemporary art rather than a catalogue of anthropological artefacts. [11] Several participants expressed special interest in Morin's graffiti and the interactive London map, and seemed struck by the idea of contemporary and future performances creating new historical sites of indigenous significance. Such responses leave us hopeful that the digital platform will also find an enthusiastic audience.

the timing of the Cherokee delegation's visit meant that they could not actually have attended performances at Covent Garden Theatre, they were regular visitors to pantomimes at Sadler's Wells and toured prominent London sites. An earlier delegation of Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) visitors, commonly called the Four Indian Kings, had visited Queen Anne in 1710 and attended a performance of Macbeth at the Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket, where the audience would not allow the performance to begin until the Native American visitors were moved from the pit to a box on the stage where they could be seen throughout the show. For a detailed consideration of the painting,

About a year after Morin's live interventions, we learnt that Roman London sits six metres below the surface level of the streets on which we currently walk (Pearson 2014). As we researched potential sites to include on the interactive map, those six metres became palpable as a vibrant material stratum, layers of which indexed the lives of countless indigenous people who have visited London over the last 500 years – as captives, entertainers, traders, servants, dignitaries, athletes and more – all leaving traces, however fleeting, of their presence. It wasn't difficult to conceive of Tahltan songs penetrating this subterranean space, resonating with the cultural fragments it contains and, in doing so, creating a disturbance in the material foundations of the city. Jane Bennett's work on enchantment offers a way of calibrating the potential power of such disturbances as part of an ethical relationship with the material world. 'To be enchanted', in Bennett's terms, 'is to be struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday' (2001, p. 4). This feeling, which comes from an unexpected encounter enabled by sensory attunement to the 'vibrant matter' of the universe, causes 'a new circuit of intensities [to form] between material bodies' (2001, p. 104). Morin's graffiti shares many of these features, emerging from and returning to the material environment. Put differently, 'Enchantment is a feeling of being connected in an affirmative way to existence; it is to be under the momentary impression that the natural and cultural worlds *offer gifts* and, in doing so, remind us that it is good to be alive' (2001, p. 156; original emphasis). The philosophical endpoint of this thinking is an ethics of generosity towards other bodies that makes us aware of our interdependence. Interestingly, the state Bennett describes involves a certain amount of aesthetic play, [12] which also resonates closely with Morin's processes. What we can glean from his performance-making and its ensuing disturbances is not just a personal ethos of kinaesthetic engagement with his surroundings, but also a sense of art's capacity to gift the magic of enchantment to others. Sonic graffiti seems especially suited

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Working from Friedrich Schiller's philosophies, Bennett discusses humans' in–built 'play–drive' as engaging, and balancing, our active and passive natures so as to enhance receptivity to the material world (2001: 138–39).

to this task: 'to en-chant', Bennett reminds us, 'is to surround with song or incantation; hence, to cast a spell with sounds' (2001, p. 6).

Beyond the new aesthetic relations that Morin's work and our own efforts in design and curation appear to have evoked, *Cultural Graffiti in London* participates in a larger socio-political project, the sensory and embodied work of remembering history differently. Such remembering is not just a matter of becoming alert to subaltern voices silenced by hegemonic accounts of the past. It also involves rethinking the conventional geographies of indigenous presence and mobility so as to encompass ongoing sites of cultural entanglement 'at home' in the imperial metropolis, as well as in its erstwhile colonies. A corollary to this kind of memory work, Morin's performances suggest, is to embrace the possibility, central to indigenous epistemologies of place (and to Bennett's enchanted materialism), that 'sites not only have meaning but volition, acting upon the lives of human (and other) peoples' (Thrush 2011, p. 54). The concept of cultural graffiti responds directly to this apperception of non-human agency. Morin's songs neither ventriloquise nor anthropomorphise the sites to which he sings; instead, they connect people and places in an act of commemoration. In this respect, the artist's graffiti also becomes a monument. Its efficacy as such, like London's more tangible sites of memory, turns on its 'temporal interaction with an audience that itself is no eternal public, but a succession of interacting subjects' (Widrich 2014, p. 6). This idea of performativity renewing itself, and thus enduring, through interactions that are never exclusively human has percolated through our project, in its various in-situ iterations as well as its migrations from live performance to gallery exhibition to online platform. To perceive Morin's graffiti as material and monumental among the many other historical icons that dot London's landscape is to glimpse the potential of performance to extend to the very firmament of the city itself. With such glimpses, we have come to recognise

many sites on which an architecture of postcolonial memory might be realised. The role of artworks in such a project, as Bourriaud's work insists, 'is no longer to form imaginary and utopian realities, but to actually be ways of living and models of action within the existing real, whatever the scale of action chosen by the artist' (2002, p. 13). Morin's sonic interventions enact – and echo – this challenge, insisting that his people are alive and vital and, crucially, that they remain.

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