

PERMANENT VACATION

Paul Domela

presentation delivered at the 'Curating The Other: Curator as Tourist' seminar, Dartington College of Arts, 21 April 2007

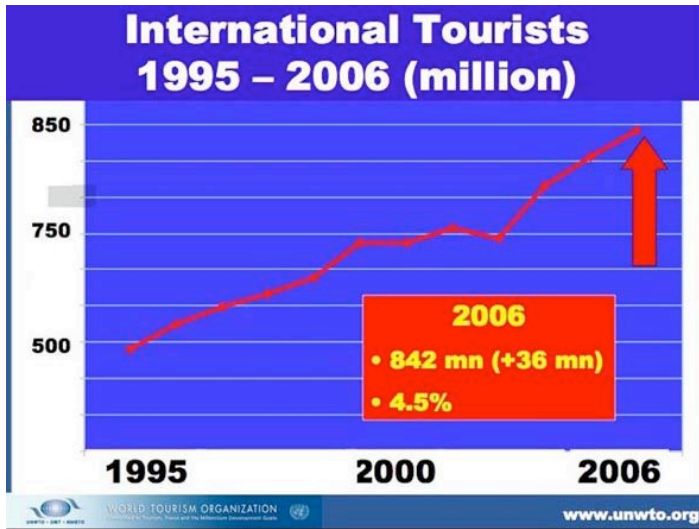
Abstract

Today, the idea of culture as an expedient underpins enormous capital investment in a contemporary art infrastructure (e.g. China, UAE). Increasingly, culture is supported as a purveyor of economic development, a tourist attraction and a tool to remediate social inequality. Curators are not only tourists but increasingly they are curators of tourism. How may curators retain a criticality in the face of the tourist gaze?

PERMANENT VACATION

Permanent Vacation is the title of Jim Jarmusch's 1980 debut film and shows a bleak New York populated by characters who no longer care about anything or anyone, they do what they feel as though in a state of permanent vacation. *Permanent Vacation* might be the state in which we find ourselves if we stop engaging our work with the world.

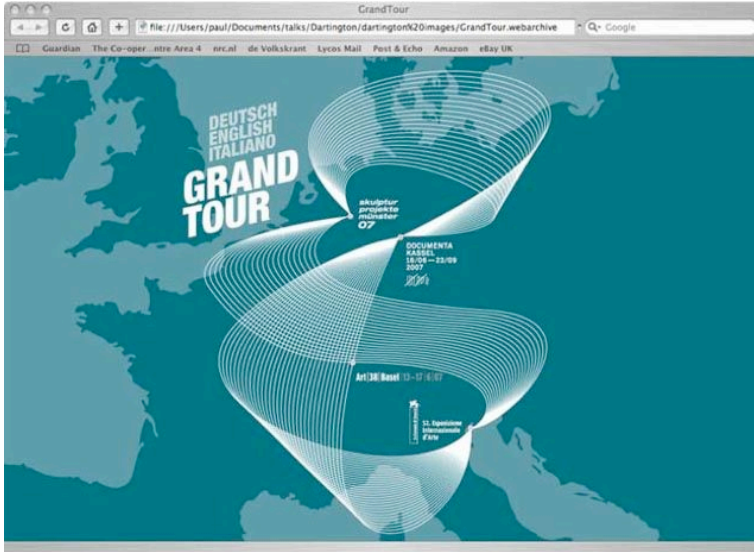
The idea of 'the curator as a tourist' is perhaps less provocative today than it may seem, now that tourism has become ubiquitous – Totnes and this region, like Andalucia, Amsterdam, London or Liverpool, would not survive without tourism. We sleep in a B&B, the restaurant rents rooms - and the distinction between work and leisure time is wearing thin – all of us consciously or unconsciously have incorporated this mode of being. Let us look at a world increasingly determined by tourism, the worlds' number one growth industry and increasingly the arena of cultural production.



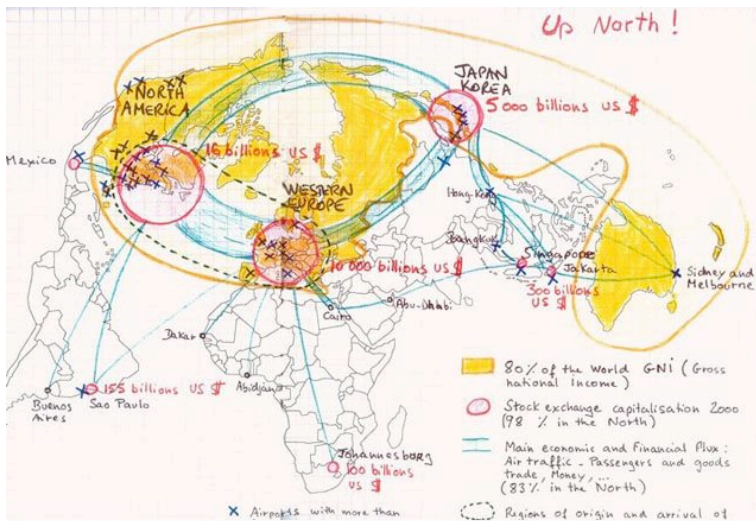
Between 1995 and 2005 world tourism has more than doubled from 400m in 1995 to 840m in 2005 and the UN World Tourism Organisation predicts that in 2020 1.6b tourists will be moving around the globe - approximately 20% of the worlds population.



It should come as no surprise that art institutions such as museums are an integral part of this industry (60% of visitor to Tate Modern count as tourist) and of course Biennials are also part of this leisure complex.



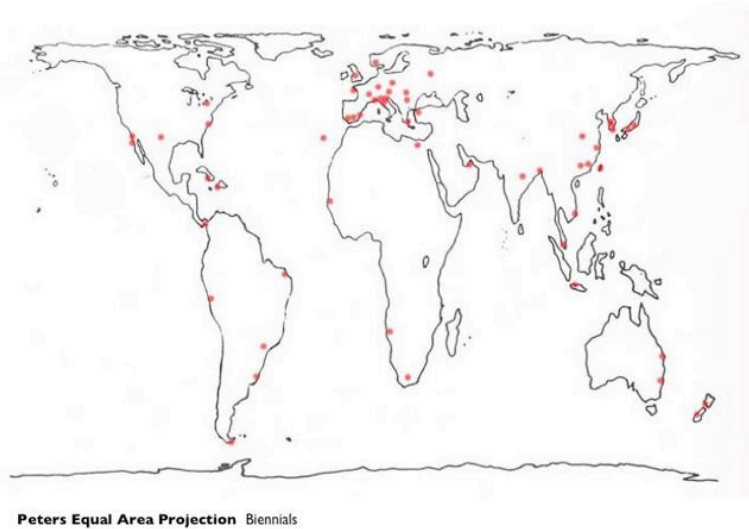
The Venice Biennale was founded in 1894 with the explicit aim of attracting tourists to the city of Venice. It did so with great success, in 1895 224.000 visitors came partly because of a combi ticket with the Italian railways. Although the number of visitors is no longer significant, visitors to the Biennale spend more, and this is one of the main reasons the Biennale continues to receive public support today.



Philippe Rekacewicz Maps about Globalization (sketch)

This sketch by French cartographer geographer Philippe Rekacewicz shows the distribution of the gross national income and market capitalisation in the world in the year 2000. It attempts to show the economic and financial flux: 83% of which happens between Europe, the US and Japan.

The axes are the global cities: New York, London, Tokyo, with minor routes to places like Sao Paulo, Singapore, Abu Dhabi, Dakar and Johannesburg.



When we look at the Biennials listed on the Universes in Universe website, we get this picture: as you see, the world of Biennials largely follows the world of globalised capital.

We are in an unprecedented process of urbanisation. This year, for the first time in history, more than half of the world's population will live in cities. Cities are growing at a phenomenal rate. It is not in Europe, but in what we have been calling the 'developing world' will we find the world's mega-cities.

TABLE 8. POPULATION OF URBAN AGGLOMERATIONS WITH 10 MILLION INHABITANTS OR MORE IN 2005 AND THEIR AVERAGE ANNUAL RATES OF GROWTH, 1975-2005 AND 2005-2015

Urban agglomeration	Population (millions)				Average annual rate of change (percentage)	
	1975	2000	2005	2015	1975-2005	2005-2015
1 Tokyo.....	26.6	34.4	35.2	35.5	0.93	0.08
2 Ciudad de México (Mexico City).....	10.7	18.1	19.4	21.6	1.99	1.05
3 New York-Newark.....	15.9	17.8	18.7	19.9	0.55	0.60
4 São Paulo.....	9.6	17.1	18.3	20.5	2.15	1.13
5 Mumbai (Bombay).....	7.1	16.1	18.2	21.9	3.15	1.84
6 Delhi.....	4.4	12.4	15.0	18.6	4.08	2.12
7 Shanghai.....	7.3	13.2	14.5	17.2	2.28	1.72
8 Kolkata (Calcutta).....	7.9	13.1	14.3	17.0	1.98	1.73
9 Jakarta.....	4.8	11.1	13.2	16.8	3.37	2.41
10 Buenos Aires.....	8.7	11.8	12.6	13.4	1.20	0.65
11 Dhaka.....	2.2	10.2	12.4	16.8	5.81	3.04
12 Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana.....	8.9	11.8	12.3	13.1	1.07	0.63
13 Karachi.....	4.0	10.0	11.6	15.2	3.56	2.67
14 Rio de Janeiro.....	7.6	10.8	11.5	12.8	1.39	1.07
15 Osaka-Kobe.....	9.8	11.2	11.3	11.3	0.45	0.04
16 Al-Qahirah (Cairo).....	6.4	10.4	11.1	13.1	1.82	1.66
17 Lagos.....	1.9	8.4	10.9	16.1	5.84	3.94
18 Beijing.....	6.0	9.8	10.7	12.9	1.91	1.82
19 Manila.....	5.0	10.0	10.7	12.9	2.53	1.90
20 Moskva (Moscow).....	7.6	10.1	10.7	11.0	1.12	0.34

NOTE: Urban agglomerations are ordered according to their population size in 2005.

Of the cities in the West only New York, Los Angeles and Moscow make it in the top 20, the fastest growing cities are Dhaka and Lagos. Most of these cities appear or operate with little of the planned regularity of European cities – even though people continue to be attracted to them in the hope of ‘a better tomorrow.’ In fact, as Mike Davies argues in his book *Planet of Slums*, most of these cities consist of slums, with an accelerating difference between rich and poor, organised in ghettos and gated communities. Of course, slums themselves have now become a niche in the tourism market.





Mumbai

But while some slums are made fit for tourists, big business is making up new cities from scratch.

Two weeks ago, with my double consciousness as both curator and tourist, I was in Sharjah, for the opening of the Sharjah Biennial.



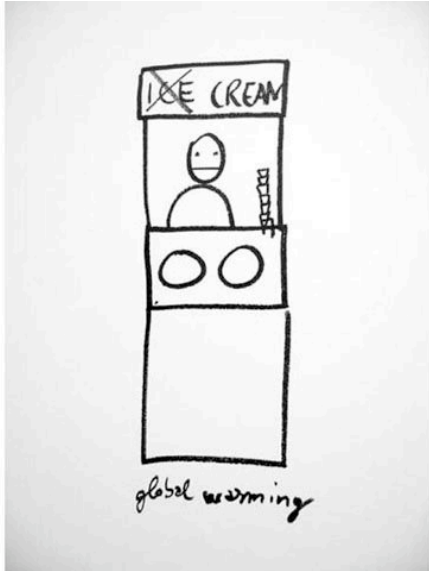
Naguchi Rika, Catching Water #4, 2001, Copied, 94x40x30cm, courtesy of the Artist / D'Amico Terra, New York / Gallery Koyama, Tokyo



Director: Hoor Al Qasimi - Artistic Director: Jack Persekian
Curators: Mohammed Kazem, Eva Scharrer, Jonathan Watkins

The Sharjah Biennial 8 (SB8), inaugurates on April 4th, 2007 in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Biennial's theme proposes art as a way of creating a better understanding about our relationship with nature and the environment, whilst considering its social, political, cultural and subjective dimensions in an interdisciplinary way. SB8 will focus on the renewed role of art in addressing a wide range of issues that alarmingly affect human existence on earth. The Biennial is aware of the critical ambiguity of its subject matter, and of the fact that it is part of the product-producing and -consuming society, and of the constantly growing tribe of biennials, that year after year, encourage a number of artists, curators, audiences and artworks to travel around the globe. Still, SB8 needs to be critical and will attempt to implicate all sectors of society into questioning our social, political, and ecological praxis.

Under the title 'Still Life; Art, Ecology and the Politics of Change' the biennial aimed to address our relationship with nature and the environment, being aware of the 'critical ambiguity of its subject matter.



Dan Perjovschi *Do we have a title?*, 2006

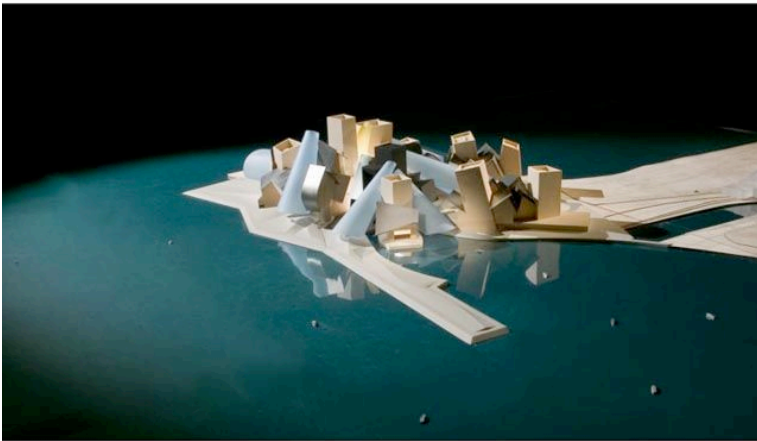
If 'global warming' is now our collective responsibility, for Sharjah, the Biennial, is of course a way to compete with Dubai and Abu Dhabi over cultural tourism and inward investment. This is a promotional video for Dubai Waterfront.



Abu Dhabi *Saadiyat Island's Cultural District*



Jean Nouvel *Louvre Abu Dhabi*

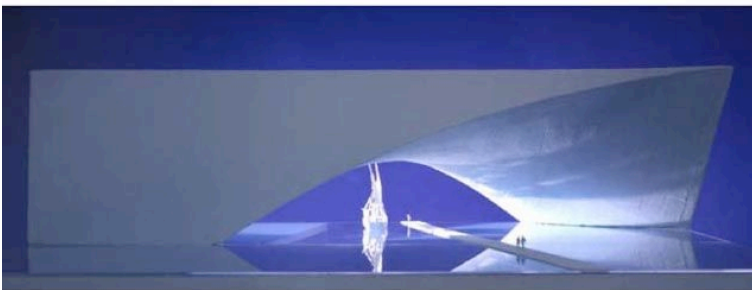


Frank Gehry *Guggenheim Abu Dhabi*



Zaha Hadid *Abu Dhabi Performing Art Centre*

If you think this vision is extraordinary, Abu Dhabi's Tourism Development and Investment Company are planning a new city of 125.000 residents sold with and an art and culture quarter at its heart including a Guggenheim designed by Frank Gehry, a Louvre branch by Jean Nouvel, a performance centre by Zaha Hadid and a Maritime Museum by Tadao Ando.



Tadao Ando *Maritime Museum*

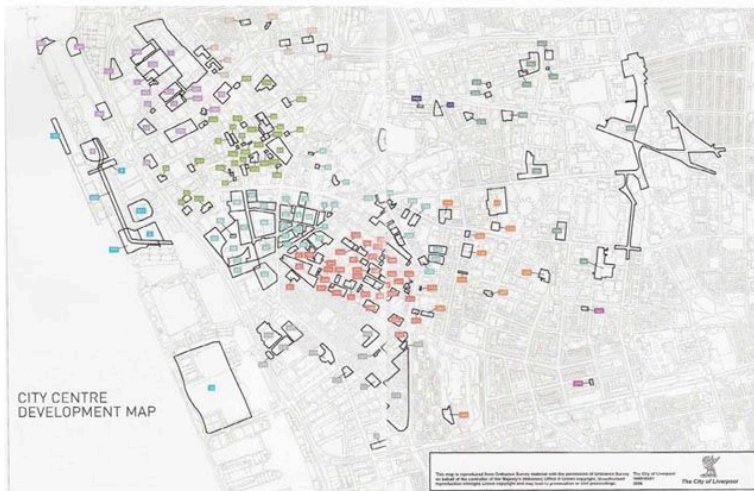
The island will also include in direct competition with Sharjah a Biennale Park with 19 pavilions, individually designed by competition. A competition will also decide which 19 curators will be commissioned to fill the pavilions. Not surprising here, as in China, the biggest supporters of cultural infrastructure are property developers.

Should you be thinking this fantasy belongs to a tourist imaginary of the Emirates, look at this video by Peel Holdings (video). Peel Holdings is a company which owns the Old Trafford shopping mall in Manchester, Liverpool John Lennon airport and last year bought the Mersey Dock and Harbour Company. They are running the second largest container port in the UK but this is their vision for the 7 miles of derelict docks, pitching Liverpool's waterfront against cities like Shanghai and Dubai.

To appreciate the audacity of this vision you have to remember that Liverpool's population has been shrinking from 1 million in the 1930s to little more than 400,000 today. In the early 90s, 400 people lived in the city centre, today there are about 4000. A combination of the end of Empire, containerisation and the collapse of industry had brought the city to the brink of total collapse.



Against this background, awarding the title Liverpool European Capital of Culture 2008 was seen as a major turning point. Today, Liverpool is a construction zone.



November 2006

This is a map of current building projects. The largest being Liverpool One, a £1 billion development of shopping, residential and hotels over 43 acres, incorporating 7 formerly public streets.



February 2005



March 2007

At the same time large parts of the city remain untouched.



Banksy 2004 > 2006

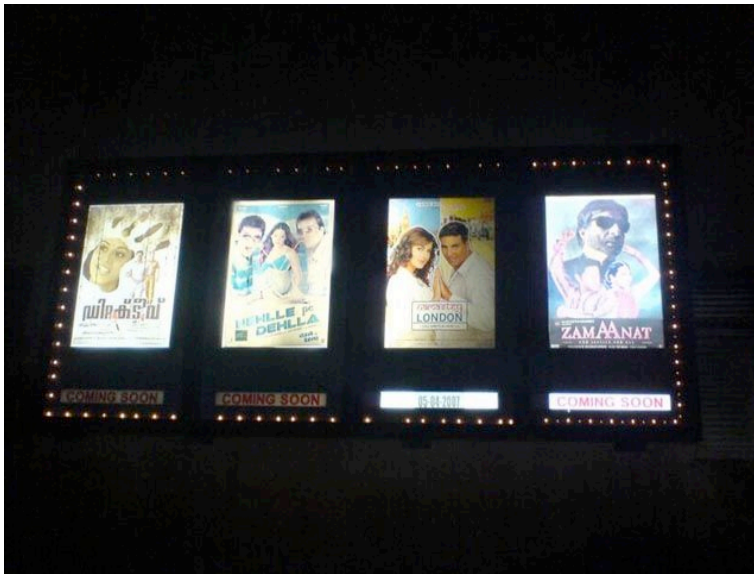


Granby Street 2004 > 2006

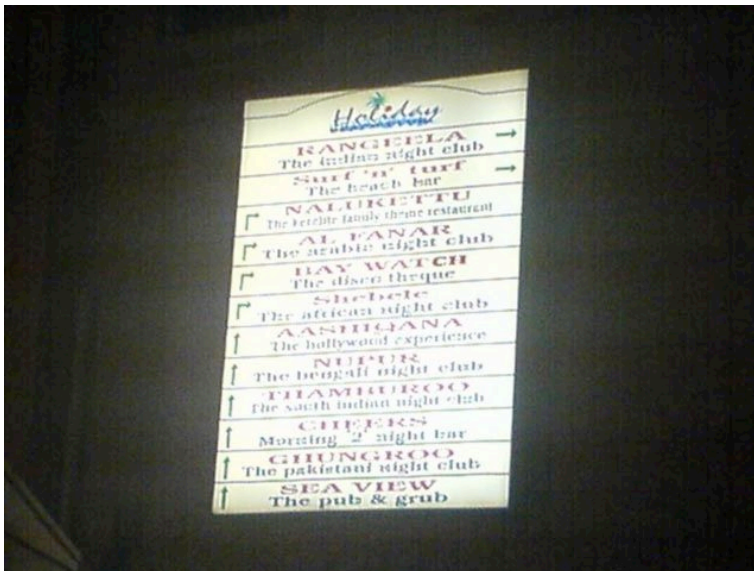


Granby Street 2004 > 2006

If shopping and tourist destinations dominate our visual horizon, the counter movement is largely invisible. 80% of the population in the UAE consists of migrant workers who have practically no rights, no right for example to bring their family, so that 75% is male.

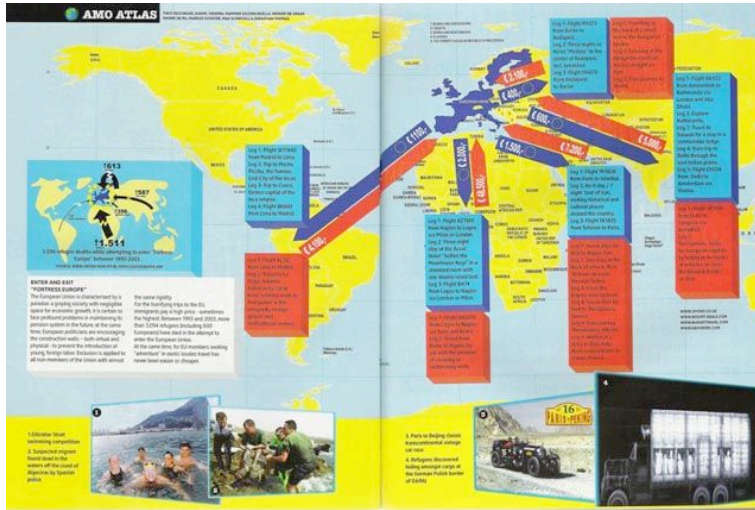


Cinemas that do not exist in Time Out Dubai, show Hindi films and this discotheque aims to attract Indians, Keralis, Arabs, Africans, Bengali, South Indians and Pakistani.



Remember the 23 Chinese cockle pickers who drowned three years ago in Morecombe Bay. Remember the story of Guo Bin Long, 28, a father of two, who rang his wife 5,000 miles away. "I am in great danger," he told her. "I am up to my chest in water. Maybe I am going to die. "

Here in a nutshell we have a different image of migration, a mobile world in which the desire for a better life crisscrosses legal/illegal boundaries, which allows the exploitation of undocumented workers 5000 miles from their families to produce cheap food for local supermarkets.



AMOMA Rem Koolhaas Content

This image by AMO, the think tank founded by Rem Koolhaas, shows the difference in the price of travel for a tourist and a migrant without papers to Fortress Europe. On the bottom left we have swimmers in the Strait of Gibraltar and an African dragged ashore by Spanish police, on the right, one image shows a rerun of the Paris-Beijing car race, the other an x-ray of a truck showing refugees hidden amongst the cargo.

Globalisation according to Arjun Appadurai is increasingly characterised by 'relations of disjuncture'.

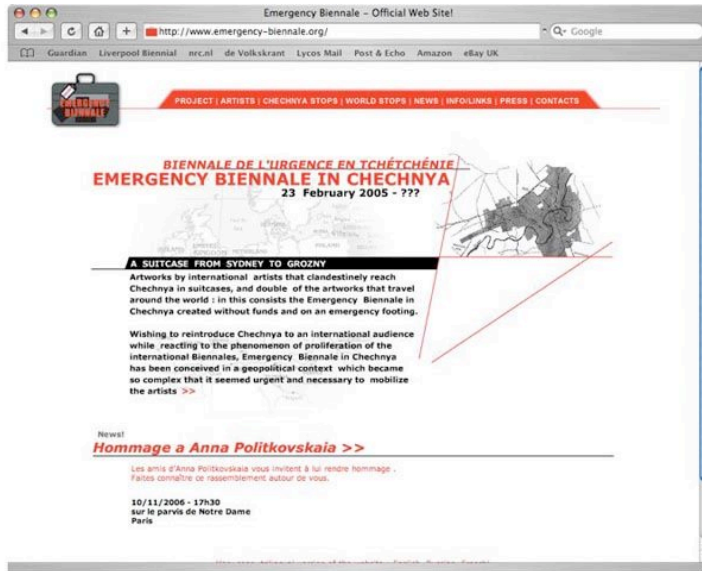
He gives some examples: "Media flows across national boundaries that produce images of well-being that cannot be satisfied by national standards of living and consumer capabilities; flows of discourses of human rights that generate demands from work forces that are repressed by state violence which is itself backed by global arms flows; ideas about gender and modernity that circulate to create large female workforces at the same time that cross-national ideologies of 'culture', 'authenticity' and national honour put increasing pressure on various communities to morally discipline just these working women who are vital to emerging markets and manufacturing sites."

(Public Culture: Millennial Quartet II: No. 1 Special Issue Vol 12. p.5)

Today more people than ever before live in places where they have not been born. I completely agree with yesterday's speaker that we have to come up with other paradigms of culture that are not attached to geo-political boundaries. If people are on the move why not the idea of culture?

Looking at the emergence of Biennials around the world is one way of analysing the relationship between art and globalisation. There is no doubt the rise of biennials in China, Korea, Singapore and Japan, Cuba, Peru, and Senegal are enormously important to artists and audiences in these regions for whom these events are often the only way to see contemporary art. I disagree with Sergei's view that these events are simply an extension of the West.

Rather than homogenising the concept of Biennials into a category I want to emphasise that the proliferation of Biennials has yielded different curatorial models, distinguishing themselves notably in their relation to place and identity, models that arise in specific time-space junctures. Where on the one hand the multiplication of Biennials follows the logic of globalised capital, as we have seen, on the other, our relation to the global has generated renewed attention to local situations – to place, to identity and to mobility - to translocal existencies - a concept developed by artist Ursula Bieman which refers to a type of mobility produced in the global era that defies geo-political categories – a life of extreme precariousness lived by the increasing number of asylum seekers who remain in between legalities.)



Where Biennials become interesting is when they produce new public spheres – this example is a tactical misuse of the ‘brand’. The Emergency Biennale in Chechnya is a project by Evelyne Jouanno, who has asked artists to contribute works that fit into a suitcase that can be send to Grosny, which as you know is pretty much completely cut off from the world. While one set of suitcases goes to Grosny, another identical set travels around the world collecting new works in each location that it is shown.

The most significant way globalisation affects us is in the way we think of place, identity, and belonging. This is increasingly the world of flows, of liquid modernity, of liquid fear, liquid love and liquid life - to speak with Zygmunt Bauman latest books.

In her lecture in Liverpool for BBC3’s festival of Free Thinking, during the last Liverpool Biennial, Doreen Massey asked: ‘What kind of an identity of place can there be for cities like Liverpool in a globalised world?’

What clearly doesn't work today is the romanticism of place that depends solely on a sense of the character growing somehow 'out of the soil'. Instead, places today are 'meeting places', where a host of different life stories become entangled in physical proximity. Each place is a particular mix, born out of a specific history, and has to be negotiated between rich and poor, between incomer and long-established resident.

As a result, the local needs to look outward, as well as within. We need to rethink the notion of the identity of place, away from ideas about ownership and towards the recognition of responsibility - including towards the global relations and peoples - upon which any place depends.'

Cedric Price suggested a way of seeing the City as CONCENTRATE, a place for residents and visitors alike, in which culture is dialogical, not imposed or imported. In his next book RADICANT, Nicolas Bourriaud tries to articulate an idea of culture which has its roots in movement. For *International 06*, Manray Hsu suggested the HYPERLINK as a metaphor to connect disparate places and realities. It through such concepts that we can think a new criticality in the face of the tourist gaze, that is able to engage with a notion of place, identity and mobility without the prejudice of origin.

I want to conclude by showing two video works. *New Town Ghost* is by Minouk Lim and artists who work in Seoul. *New Town Ghost* is a response to the gentrification of a district of Seoul where large department stores threaten to drive out shops and residents. Minouk presented this work in a conference we organized last October called 'City Breaks? Art and Culture in Times of Expediency.' It needs to be played loud.

The second work is called *The Route* by Chen Chieh-jen an artist from Taiwan which was commissioned for the *International 06*.