

# Introduction:

## Consensus versus Disagreement

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I. Rancière calls the “distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception, that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common, and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it. A distribution of the sensible, therefore, establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared, and exclusive parts ... based on a distribution of spaces, times and forms of activity that determine the very manner in which something in common lends itself to participation, and in the way in which various individuals have a part in this distribution” (Rancière, 2004a:12).

Post-millennium consensus politics are, to French philosopher Jacques Rancière, everything but a model of “social peace”. On the contrary, they suppress the struggle constitutive of the political (*la politique*), destroying the space of the political (*le politique*), and producing various forms of identitarianism, and gloom, as their flip side. Consensus politics re-established racism and xenophobia (Rancière, 2000: 119). Consensus reduces people to populations, and rights to facts, and incessantly works to fill in the gaps between things (2006: 6), denying what makes them different. This filling-in and ironing-out is also the concern of the *police*, which is, for Rancière, not identical with the uniformed arm of the State executive but a

partition of the sensible characterized by the absence of a void or a supplement: society consists of groups dedicated to specific modes of action, in places where these occupations are exercised, in modes of being corresponding to these occupations and these places. In this fittingness of functions, places, and ways of being, there is no place for a void (2001: Thesis 7).

In the space of the political, the *police* and the political confront each other as regimes of visibility, which strive to police the current distribution of the sensible or, respectively, to disrupt and re-partition it.<sup>1</sup> Their confrontation and conflict is a disagreement (*mésentente*) about what it means to speak, and over the distribution of the sensible that delimits what can be said, and determines the relationship between seeing, hearing, doing, feeling, making and thinking: “Political litigiousness/struggle is that which brings politics into being by separating it from the police that is, in turn, always attempting its disappearance ... Politics is first and foremost an intervention upon the visible and the sayable” (Rancière, 2001: Thesis 7). Politics is about altering the visibilities of places and “abilities of the body in those places, ... the partition of private and public spaces, ... the very configuration of the visible and the relation of the visible to what can be said about it” (2003: S5). Art and architecture can have a part in politics (certainly, they are not apolitical), but correspondences between aesthetic and political virtue are difficult to ascertain. There are no criteria “for establishing an appropriate correlation between the politics of aesthetics and the aesthetics of politics” (2004a: 61). Aesthetics has its own politics of changing perceptions and asserting invisible rights: for instance, the right not only to labour and suffer, but also to observe or take part in a spectacle. And, “to read what was never written” (Hofmannsthal in Benjamin, 2002: 416).

As this issue of *Interstices: A Journal of Architecture and Related Arts* goes to print, stages being set up – and up-set – in Aotearoa/New Zealand highlight this predicament. On 15 October 2007, abc NEWS reported on “the first [anti-terrorism raids] under New Zealand’s tough new anti-terrorism laws” (2007, 15 Oct). The

same day, New Zealand's TV3 news broadcast *The "Terror" Plot* about the arrest of 17 activists. The report opened with 2005 footage of Māori activist Tama Iti challenging members of the Waitangi Tribunal before the beginning of the hearings at Tauarau Marae (Ruatoki, Tuhoe; TV3, 2007).<sup>2</sup> Iri Akarana-Rewi said of this event, that it took Māori culture, which had become "catalogued and contained on performance stages", into the valleys, roads and streets as "a functioning part of everyday life" (Indigimedia, 2005). According to Iti, the performance, of which the challenge was a part, sought to make the Tribunal "feel the heat and smoke, and Tuhoe outrage and disgust at the way we have been treated for 200 years" (Indigimedia, 2005).<sup>3</sup> "Remembered most for his outrageous protests" (TV3, 2007), Iti honed his theatrical sensibilities in *The Tempest*, a collaboration with the *Mau* dance troupe, in early 2007 – at a time when Professor Paul Moon found interest in the Treaty of Waitangi at a dangerous low. Now on remand in Mt Eden Prison, Iti explores further the "delicate interstices of constitutional law" (Jackson, 1999).

2. For information about the Waitangi Tribunal and the Urewera Hearing, see [http://www.waitangi-tribunal.govt.nz/inquiries/teurerewa\\_inq/](http://www.waitangi-tribunal.govt.nz/inquiries/teurerewa_inq/)

3. Iti was subsequently convicted on two charges, which were later overturned by the Court of Appeal (TV3, 2007).

Writing, itself, is partitioned by a blurring and contested interstice. Through disagreement, politics and writing can open up new ways of perceiving. The printed word has a mobility that frees the "orphan letter" to wander aimlessly around, to talk to anyone, to undermine the sensible co-ordinates of a current aesthetic regime (Rancière, 2004b: 14). As an artistic practice, writing intervenes in the "general distribution of ways of doing and making, as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility" (2004a: 13). Printed text stages a theatrical "partition of identities, activities and spaces", exhibiting fantasies capable of disturbing the status quo to "a community of readers ... formed only by the random circulation of the written word" (14). However, as in politics, where those who previously had no-part will inevitably take part in Rancière's *police* (once they succeed in making themselves heard and becoming a part of society), writing can institutionalise, legitimise and control perception. However tentative, written words make permanent a new distribution of the sensible. This tension is a galvanizing and productive one. *Interstices*, as an academic journal (and particularly in its refereed section), is implicated in this force field. We invite readers to disagree, and thereby be part of this tension (and perhaps contribute to the next issue).

Michael Ostwald's "Dissent and Dissensus: Politics and Labour in the Architecture of Brodsky and Utkin", which opens this issue, is about the impact that blurring and changing lines between police and politics have made on the reception and critique of two representatives of the Russian paper architecture movement: Alexander Brodsky and Illya Utkin. Their work became internationally known in the wake of *glasnost*, and was immediately perceived as a form of rebellion against the authoritarian Soviet state. Ostwald questions the ways in which it was constituted as an aesthetic affront to the communist state, and investigates the nature of Brodsky and Utkin's defiance. In the force field between architectural aesthetics and politics, was their position one of juridical opposition (dissent), or a political dispute (dissensus)? Only the latter would make their practice one of Rancièrean disagreement proper. When can disagreement even take place? In "Travel in Tropical Islands – Enemies Co-existing in Peace", Tina Engels-Schwarzpaul explores the potential for creative conflict at the *Tropical Islands Resort* at Brand, Germany. Set in the ruined surrounds of a former Soviet military base in the Brandenburg province, it now stages a 'One-world-village', with a *Samoan Fale*

in the centre of a *Tropical Village* that conjures up dreams of Pacific life styles. Do visitors and operators recognize historical and current conflicts in the politics of display between locals and foreigners, former colonial power and colony?

Carl Douglas' "Barricades and Boulevards: Material transformations of Paris, 1795-1871" is about a clearly conflictual and tumultuous series of configurations. Spatial operations of barricading effected a redistribution of the sensible as they transformed Paris in different ways. The city's materials, spaces and activities are not a neutral surface. Rather, they make the city what it is, prescribe who inhabits which parts, and how. Barricades and boulevards are provisional metaphors for politics and police, for those who have no-part and those who want to control what they have. In Haussmann's Paris, middle-class individuals and the mob were allocated different spaces. In Australian refugee camps, says Hélène Frichot in "Striving for a Coming Community and the Question of a Life", architectural practices disregard inmates' personal characteristics to create artificial, categorical groupings. Architecture can augment, as well as diminish, life in geopolitical conflicts, and Frichot argues for an ethico-aesthetic striving toward a coming community, a future people and a life, to suggest modes of acting collectively, beyond the isolated point of view of individuals who believe that what they do can make no difference. Frichot draws on concepts by Giorgio Agamben, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Jean-Luc Nancy and Maurice Blanchot to outline alternatives to a spatial organization where refugees, strangers and others are segregated in the midst of a global body politic that is increasingly fragmented.

Leonhard Emmerling engages with a politics of recognition that is not identity politics, is even explicitly opposed to it. In "PLZKLME", he stages disagreements between him and himself. Starting with a quote by bell hooks, he reflects on the relationship between the global art business and identity-art. To Emmerling, the art business perpetuates the assimilation, instrumentalisation, incapacitation and paternalism that Western colonisation has inflicted on the rest of the world. In identity-art, it does so by providing a stage for the restitution of identity, as compensation for that which is, in reality, denied: redress of injustices, equal rights and the realisation of an undamaged life. A reticence that Emmerling finds lacking in identity-art, with its eagerness to expose and demonstrate, made Linda Walker and Stephen Loo consider the role of writing in, "And the open bridge: labour, enchantment, *There Forever*", their reflections on a 2007 Ephemeral Public Art Project in Adelaide. Explorations of Rancière's writings are interwoven with poetical vignettes describing the events, spaces and objects of this project. No community is taken for granted, the role of the political only tentatively circumscribed, as writing itself is tested to see how much it "conceals itself in the flesh", and how much it "openly reveals itself as the disembodied condition of any glorious flesh" (Rancière, 2004a: 60). In any event, writing applies a different language to the languages of the unwritten, and may even stand in the way of reading what was never written.

In the non-refereed section of *Interstices 08*, contributors take issue with architects and academics, juries and judging and books and buildings. The first two papers are from, and about, East Asia. Hong-Chi Shiau's, "The Glamorous, but Doomed, Bamboo Forest" narrates Tsai-Ho Cheng's competition winning memorial project to the victims of the 1999 earthquake in Taiwan. Shiau reveals misalignment between intellectual and local desires and interpretations, and shows how a lack of consultation with locals led to the project's failure. Tom Daniell, in "The Letter of the Law", explains how Tokyo's volumetric building regulations shape an unusual skyline of steeply angled roofs. Daniell shows how, in the pursuit of interesting urban form, it is possible to manipulate the regulations to good effect.

Bill McKay, in "A Short Venting of the Spleen on the Subject of the Architect and Science", reflects upon what scientists have learnt about spherical planets and gravitational forces over the last 500 years, and wonders why these discoveries have not filtered through into architectural thinking, drawing and practice. In "The Myth of the Nation", Andrew Leach targets New Zealand's architectural profession, and suggests that local architects embrace an overly simplistic understanding of this country's architectural history. Celebrating "exquisite apartness" and myths about New Zealand-ness, they ignore recent scholarship and alternative possibilities. Similarly, Paul Walker finds a lack of awareness in *Architecture Inspired by New Zealand* (2006), a book on houses in New Zealand landscapes, pointing to naivety in its conceptualization, and reliance upon clichés in its realization. In contrast, Peggy Deamer's re-creation and analysis of "Dick Toy's Last Lecture", presented during the 2007 Auckland Architecture Week, demonstrates the desired levels of both complexity and nuance. Following, Julia Gatley, in "New Measures for Other Moderns", navigates a path between historiography and pedagogy, reflecting upon the past, present, future and historiographical implications of the Measured Drawing course at the University of Auckland.

Kerstin Thompson Architects and Architecture Workshop's competition entry for the Waitangi Precinct on Wellington's waterfront (2005) is a scheme that warrants a more substantial place in the published record than it has been given to date, the local contributors having earned their place in the international field of entrants. Finally, Tim Adams' translation of Daniel Payot's "Le Jugement de l'Architecture" ("The Judgement of Architecture"), is concerned with criticism in the broadest sense, and architectural criticism in particular. One of Payot's key points is that all criticism is ultimately positive.

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