

Walking and drawing with cling film

by Giacomo Picca



cling film_Ricky, dec 2007

Introduction

In this paper I am going to express some feelings and thoughts concerned with the notions of my mobility and my interventions in the urban landscape. Originally, I was going to concentrate on the project “cling film” as a participatory urban intervention - where the interaction challenges the notion of authorship in the public arena and also, it generates the possibilities for ‘revolution’ by the creative transformation of the urban space.

I am also going to present some other of my projects that follow the same spirit. I have to say, this spirit reflects my involvement in the collaborative group project “London Biennale” conceived by the artist David Medalla, which I have been involved with since 2000.

In all of these projects I am drawing my “routes”, with the spirit of exploration, in the different spatial fields in the contemporary metropolis. I am drawn and attracted by the visual motifs and to making relations to my encounters where I try developing strategies that create spaces that signify the possibilities of change.

While preparing this essay I have been encouraged to drive through the history of my life, looking at my past. Into my mind comes Eva Hoffman's book "Lost in Translation", where she writes: "...without changing its meaning, one would have to transport its audience as well". For this presentation I intend to travel to my past experiences and I have to move you with me. I am going to describe some experiences that affected me in my perceptions of the world.

When I was 12 years old I went to a trip with my family to the Northeast state of Bahia, in Brazil. This trip is the clearest remembrance of my past that I have in my mind. Living in a big center like São Paulo at that time, social injustices were not as obvious as it is today, in contemporary Brazil. At that time the trip to Bahia caused a big impression on me. Bahia is the most African State in Brazil where most of the population is descendent of African slaves.

The impact of what I heard and saw during that trip was enormous. It was the saga of African people forced to work as slaves in the cocoa and sugar cane farms. They were the stories of survival, struggling to keep their costumes, their behavior and their culture in the new land. The stories that I heard were stories of constant moving, mapping out ways to new spaces and, creating spaces for survival. These new spaces for these people, literally and metaphorically, signified a condition that resisted the causes and odds of a system that imposed and enforced their will in all available means to satisfy their needs.

The culture of African people in Brazil throughout its history survived resisting all attempts of oppressing it. The African people found different ways to keep and perpetuate their rituals; they found in the system accepted spaces where they could via different means keep their traditions. The African people found ways in the acceptable spaces, where they could disguise the fundamentals of their religion and celebrate them through their different rituals.¹ For example, the landlords of the farms allowed certain festivities to be celebrated. The rituals in itself are performed inside an imaginary space demarcated by the composition of a particular choreography. The events in the new spaces had a mythical meaning and they were related to other dimensions or other states of being where through these means, they were able to perpetuate the knowledge of their culture.

Furthermore, as a "secret society", through these rituals, they were developing a dance and movements for self-defence. These moments would also help the people to keep a sense of community and identity, enhancing their self-esteem and preserving their dignity as people - today this dance

¹ It is known as religious syncretism, and in Colonial Brazil it was a very common phenomenon, where there was the influence of beliefs of traditional African religion into rituals of the Catholic Church.

ritual and fight is well known as Capoeira. N.B. It is this idea of 'secret society' as an example of a 'relation' that I will emphasise as a key aspect of my work with reference to Bourriaud's 'Relational Aesthetics'.

I felt excited by the stories and also very sad by our history. It was a history of Colonialism, as we well know. I realized that I knew so little about the world and, the experiences of this travel to the Northeast State of Bahia has influenced me in the different ways I see the world. Conditions for "justice" and mechanisms for social change and its influence in stimulating power for transformation became central in my enquiries regarding the different strata of social life.

Thus, as a living being and as a contemporary artist I have been pursuing strategies and actions to release the individual, creating moments and spaces that transcend the contradictions and mental pressure by the conditions that we live, imposed by the economic system order - how the different people from geographical and cultural spaces have to live their lives.

In a statement that I wrote in the 90's, for my application to study at Wimbledon School of Art I say: "Many years ago I came here as a civil engineer from a tropical paradise. From a life filled with ambiguities: with skyscrapers and *favelas*, from a society bordered by extremes of wealth and poverty, samba and street killings...I came here to be an artist and somehow to try and resolve all these contradictions, at least in myself".

This statement reflects a socio-economic problem of Brazil that is expressed by the migration of people from the North to the South of Brazil, from poor to richer areas. The conditions of these migrants were not much different to the stories that I experienced during my trip to Bahia. It also reflects the problem of immigration that Europe and other rich nations are having today. Peoples are moving on a great scale between geographical spaces searching for a better life. Obviously as it is well known, one of the ways of stopping such movements is better distribution of wealth. Immigrants seeking a better condition of life, in most of the cases the immigrants leave their family behind; the reality in that case can be a sad one and can have disastrous impacts for the individuals and people. In the new spaces the people can be alienated, increasing even more the distance between individuals; as a consequence, many layers of different reality are created.

The strategies in my nomadism, my movement, have the intention to permeate the many different layers; extremes and contradictions built by the ambiguities of interests of the dominant order. In Brazil, and obviously in the world, economic interests still repress alternative attempts at better distribution of wealth. The media controls to a great extent our public and mental spaces influencing how we should live our lives. People in the different geographical spaces are affected by different policies but the world

around us is never made up of one cause or one effect, the different elements of information that allows us to judge the cause and effects are infinite. But, an artist has a powerful tool to expose and/or enhance this problem, finding different means to reveal new spaces that suggest the basic potential of human liberation.

I am ethnically from Europe, brought up in Brazil and living in England, the movement between the cultures are traced by my own history and is reflected by a line created in space and time where I try to narrate the very experience of the changes between the different socio-political realities that I experience.

As an artist, through my journey between these realities I attempt to find different modes of production that determine not only an ideological and practical arena but also new formal fields searching in the production of art models for the invention of something new, a process of learning and search for a superior order that enhances the freedom of the individual and also of the collective. We could say that my activities as an artist aim to find a kind of antidote for the social catastrophes generated by the functioning of the capitalism system. Guy Brett in a text called "our routes are our branches" describes

"...confrontation with art, and the history of art, inevitably throws personal experience into a new light. The subjective is brought into relationship with the objective, material fact of the work of art..."²

Thus, the historical conditions linked to the evolution of technology, the proliferation of mass communication, the disasters of wars, the market as a space for economic experiments gives more purpose for art, in particular relational art practices becomes a way to continue in a road for reflection by the means of intervention in different spaces, mental spaces and public spaces. Therefore, art activism in a collective approach responds to the socio-political realities and this mode encourages me towards a criticism of the social order and also motivates me to develop mechanisms that enhance life as revolution.

The strategies for intervention in public spaces via the integration of the body in movement in the urban space is a way to permeate the different layers of the social strata. There are different disciplines that study the relation of man and the environment such as, sociology, anthropology etc. but today we can approach contemporary art via relational aesthetics as a hybrid of experience and practice. Thus, recipes for aesthetic discourses and theoretical models make spaces for the artist to work with; therefore

² Guy Brett "Our Roots are our Branches", text for exhibition catalogue - *Trees for the Wood* - Giacomo Picca, Gallery 32, London, 2003.

the artist has the freedom to play with them and conduct a different strategy of activities.

Thus, the artist works with different mediums and I am going to try to discuss some consequences in relation to the articulation of my movements in space when drawing a line in the project “cling film”.

The artist’s movements in spaces leave a residuum from a process of dislocations. This residuum is already a medium for communication between the artist and the space; the traces of the movements are the expression of time in a process of accumulation. Richard Long defines this process as a portrait of the country when doing his walks. As he describes:

“ A walk marks time in an accumulation of footsteps. It defines the form of the land. Walking the roads and paths is to trace a portrait of the country. I have become interested in using a walk to express original ideas about the land, art and walking itself”. (Richard Long, Words after facts, 1982)

The act of walk defines lines, then a form, after a diagram, an image that in the end denotes a portrait of the landscape; it becomes a generator of ideas. In the urban context the act of walking is constantly producing different encounters between the artist and the environment, the infiltration of the artist in these situations creates a dialect that articulates a dialogue between the fixed structures of the urban space and the people that experience the space, resulting in a new shared space.

My activity as an artist is to develop strategies of inclusion in the different contexts, establishing relationships that have proprieties that expose the particularities of the space. The relations of the artist with the people determine a specific temporality that reveals anxieties and desires from the people of that locality. These states are reflected by and in the processes that the artist intends to symbolize.

Now, I am going to illustrate the issues discussed here that apply to my different art projects, as follows:

Project “cling film”



cling film_Rockinham Estate, nov 2007

The idea of urban nomadism is made enjoyable through a philosophy of social engagement. The interactions are initiated in a playful and constructive manner during my psychogeographical adventures where I explore the geographical localities. Here I will demonstrate these principles with the example of my practice “cling film”.

Drawings are made connecting the cling film to different objects in the cityscape, like poles, signposts, traffic lights and trees. The lines are created from found points located in a particular locality in the public space. Once an initial point is established, the new line starts to unfold until it is connected to a new point, an additional point is found and one more line is formed, eventually the last line is united to the very first point. A new space is finally defined. The results of all the relations are drawings made in and of spaces.

The processes of interaction with the local people reveal further compositions of imminent spaces. The process of making the drawings collaboratively develops a moment of awareness for the potential of change in our routines in the day-to-day life. Does it raise a question of the dichotomy between end and new beginning? Are the lines a boundary between the new defined spaces and the original place where it all begun? I am now going to attempt to answer these questions:

I started to describe the project from the subject point of view where the body is the point of origin of observations and measurements. The subject is active in developing a mathematical model to construct a space allowing thus different fields of accomplishment for production of relations. The inter-relations initiated by the artist cause in a particular time a creation of a deeper connection between the locality and the peoples involved in the intervention.

The close relation between the objects and the effective process of creation validates the space characterized by the alteration of the locality by the relations developed during the interaction. The created new space is shaped by the participation, actions, and experiences materialized during a process of alteration of the locality

The line drawing made from the cling film suggests a map of a new space. It becomes a region of contact between an interior and an exterior. It is charged by the dichotomy between the moment of turbulence and the moment of equilibrium caused by the interferences between the subject and the objects found in the locality. But the dialect between the two moments opens a new space and this space, stimulated by the relations between people, has the potential that creates forces of transformation. This is possible because the individual has a multitude of experiences and is able to differentiate them and to adapt to different realities; and, during this process of permanent reconstruction, the individual moves towards renovation of herself and/or the surrounding. Therefore, this set of practice concluded by the creation of the space, triggering mechanisms for analysis and reflections of the individual's temporal presence.

The necessity of the individual in developing relations and the representation of the new space exposes the immediacy of experiences between an interior and an exterior. The abrupt interference with the membrane of cling film in the urban space and, at the same time, the lightness and transparency of the material, define the tension between these two fields but the emphasis is on the existence of the outside.

The dynamic of the movement in constructing the lines creates an aperture in the environment releasing energy during the process. This movement in this open field, somewhere between an outside and inside, devel-

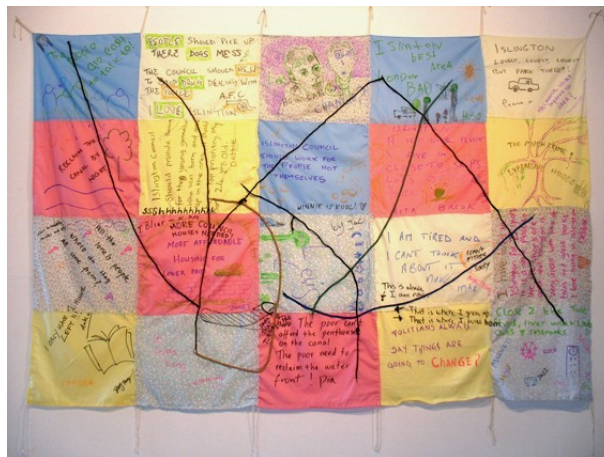
ops in the individual an act of creating something new, enhancing impulses in direction to a future. As Deleuze describes:

...”the outside is always an aperture towards a future, where nothing finishes, because nothing has never started - everything is in a state of metamorphosis...” (Deleuze *Foucault*).

The transparent membrane of cling film reveals that what is happening in the outside is directly reflected on the inside thereby developing a transit to an autonomous new field. It is an aperture towards a region of constant flux and in permanent mutability but it is an area of potential freedom; the individual has the power to access this state anytime she initiates the relational process starting a new drawing.

The compositions created by the “cling film” create a new territory fruit of a moment of awareness of the existence of the present where the intensity of experiences for its production, give a sense of purpose, enhancing in the individual the potential for discovering something now, something new, something happening or something about to happen. Thus, the construction of the lines and the creation of the new space open a field for dialogue where the individual can exercise potentialities for transformation and change.

Project “walking in”



walking in islington_ jun 2007

As we said above: the idea of urban nomadism is made enjoyable through a philosophy of social engagement. The interactions are initiated in a playful and constructive manner during my psychogeographical adventures where I explore the geographical localities. Here I will demonstrate these principles with the example of my practice “walking in”.

I engage with people that I meet and I question. The moment of the interaction encourages the people to communicate their own experiences and desires. The people respond to the question manifesting in a piece of fabric of their choice. Finally, I stitch all the different pieces of fabric together and I draw the lines of my walk with my own shoe-lace. The lines are the mapping out of my mobility through the diverse localities reflecting my interactions in the urban space.

All along the duration of the exhibition the public was also invited to participate on the piece interpreting the question as they wished. Each individual has chosen to manifest on it by, either drawing or writing, using a provided set of pen. The space where the work is displayed is altogether the space of interaction, a space of openness and released to dialogues.

The history of the new encounters, of the relationships, are organized in space and time and are summarized in the form of photography, diagrams, drawings that map the trajectory of the artist. The map therefore, becomes the register of the outline of the particular set of relations amalgamated by all the encounters in space and time. The map, the route of the artist is charged by the accumulation of experiences in search for a field that reveal the potential for transformation.

The experience (re)opens other fields of reflection. It reflects an opportunity for natural manifestation that we desire, and are *able* to have but perhaps do not take because of our routines, duties, fears and psychological barriers. Some of these inhibitions are to do with aesthetic consideration of what art ‘should’ look like.

In a state of reflection, with direct means and simple materials, the individual is engaged in an artistic experience. The transit between moments of our everyday lives, through the urban/social environment to the gallery/cultural environment, expands these spaces of reflection from a particular socio-politico environment towards a collective artistic experience. The spontaneity mediated by the choice of an individual’s visual manifestation and the juxtaposition of the materials, combines to subvert preconceived considerations of aesthetic models and reflects a search for a particular urban sensibility.

Project “nomadic mobile tree”



mobile tree_clerkenwell, nov 1999



mobile tree_judit,jul 2002

Again: the idea of urban nomadism is made enjoyable through a philosophy of social engagement. The interactions are initiated in a playful and constructive manner during my psychogeographical adventures where I explore the geographical localities. Here I will demonstrate these principles with the example of my practice “nomadic mobile tree”.

I use the tree as a mediator of personal experiences and a shared sign operating in different cultural spaces. I started discussing issues of mobility and relational processes with this project, back in 1999, when I carried a wooden cut-out of a tree on my journeys. The tree was originally designed to be glued to a landscape painting that I was working on at the time. Instead I placed the tree against reflections of cityscapes, usually on shop windows; and also, I took photos of people holding/interacting with the tree, people that I met during my travels.

In that way I found that I could move among different layers of reality and permeating spaces without any negotiations of entrance neither of exits, therefore without beginnings or ends, I found that I could experience some unknown or indefinable fields, the space in between the membrane. I just keep moving and during these journeys I keep articulating moments

of encounters. Each encounter is activated by a different spatiality and temporality and functions as a mediator between a proposition for an aspired moment and a real moment.

The image of the mobile tree as a generic form, on one hand, it operates metaphorically as a sign for our memories of different spaces, different cultural-political systems and different geographies. The tree thus opens up other spaces of interpretations, which operate in the field between what we consider we know and what we actually know. On the other hand, it becomes a sign of my own self. It is a way to include myself in the portrait with a device that signifies myself. I am in the portrait without being there. The people start to relate to the object tree in a quite personal way because a kind of relationship has been started in whatever form somewhere in time. The tree is the synthesis of this relationship and the photo negotiates the interaction between myself and the person portrayed.

The photos are the spontaneous negotiations of the moments that I encounter in my mobility. They are the memories, spontaneous memories of the unpredictable situations that I experience in these different places. The tree in this state of mobility has the potential to become an agent of liberation that exists with differences of realities.

Project “draw_drawing_”



draw_drawing_ Gallery 32, ago 2004

In this project “draw drawing” the idea of urban nomadism continues to be made enjoyable through a philosophy of social engagement. The interactions are initiated with the use of global telecommunications, still in a playful and constructive manner but greatly expanding my psychogeographical adventures to explore geographical localities in other ways.

This project starts as an open invitation written in an email to anyone that receives it and reads it. It is an invitation to any individual in the planet to take part in a drawing exhibition in London. All the process is documented in the website www.giacomopicca.com and in the future www.draw-drawing.co.uk

The email is circulated electronically and randomly all over the world as a chain mail. The people that read it choose themselves which, and how many drawings they want to send to the exhibition. I receive the drawings from the hands of the Royal Mail postman. All the drawings are finally placed side by side in a space in London for a short period of time. A temporary network is determined in a particular space and time. The line starts invisibly through the exchanges of emails between people in the Internet. For the duration of the exhibition the space is open for people to bring drawings or making a drawing in the space extending the process of accumulation of experiences.

The intention of all these invisible interactions via the Internet is to represent the line as a protagonist of a collective language that trespasses boundaries and consequently has the potential to erase differences that we have been experiencing throughout history.

The line is created by the map out of the journey of the propagation of information through digital pathways - Internet and also by the return of the drawings - via post. It is an investigation into how the “universal” written words open responses from experiences inhabiting particular spaces. How subjective experiences from different places are shared with other spaces: geographical spaces or mental spaces. It is an attempt to find out if a line really defines a boundary, if it is a sign for differences or similarities. As Heidegger describes:

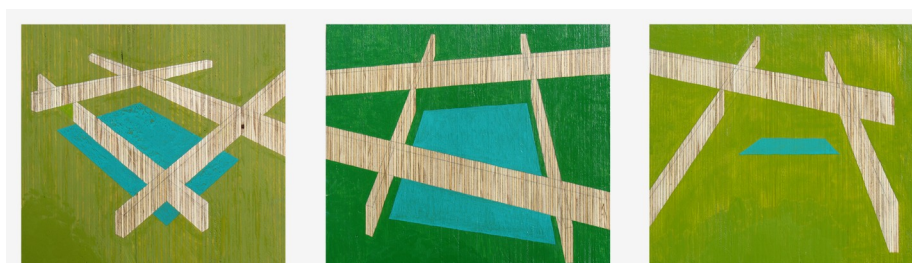
“...a boundary is not that at which something stops but, ... the boundary is that from which something begins its essential unfolding...” (Building, Dwelling, Thinking 1954)

The boundaries of the Gallery are not an end, not the final showing of the drawings. The visiting public is invited to represent their own experiences and desires also - making and adding drawings throughout the show. The juxtaposition and accumulation of images that speak of the differences in realities intends to celebrate the diversity of cultures and societies and their individuality mediated through a common language, drawing.

It is a proposition of new ways of relations and new models of sociability by the use of the technology of the Internet thus, it opens up a new space of reflection, where the participants are side by side creating a communal field of activity as a celebration of expression of 'non-territoriality'.

The final documentation in the website of all the process reiterates the collective desire to create new areas of conviviality introducing new types of spaces of transactions where, everyone can experience the participation; reaffirming thus, the spirit of solidarity stimulated by the potential of communication of the world wide web.

Project "border line"



along the edge, feb 2006

The idea of urban nomadism is made enjoyable through a philosophy of social engagement, but now utilises the tradition of painting. This interaction was initiated by an encounter between my self and one other individual; a student.

Here, I apply paint in the form of a grid configuration of a cityscape but the line of intersection between the planes I leave unpainted - "open".

I started this project after seen a drawing done by one special needs student when I was teaching. He was ethnically from Africa. It was a drawing of his back garden, in East London. I found the drawing very beautiful and I felt that I could have done the drawing myself in any moment of my own

history. I asked him if I could copy it and do a painting from it and that I was going to call it -“Deison’s garden”. He smiled...

My attention was drawn to the fence itself and how he distorted it. The fence, at first, is seen as a barrier, the borderline between his house and his neighbours but his lines were deformed. For me, the ‘faults’ appeared as spaces in the imminence of doing something; they were quite active and gave me a sense of openness.

This painting -included in the Border Line Project- makes a reference to city plans, allotments and urban environments; the networks that forms communities and consequently, raise the problems of the different socio and cultural realities.

In this project, I am working on the idea of the hidden spaces in between the particular cells, the invisible membrane of cling film where, somehow, “one stops’ and the “other starts”. These spaces can be generators of tensions that inhabit our private, public and psychological experiences of a particular reality as well as the socio-political and economic reality in the particular and universal notions of culture and territory.

The bare lines that initially separate the spaces reveal the use of the grid as a symbol of utopia and social change. The paintings are revealing their own structure, the support that holds the medium as the creator of the network of information and imagery, driven by the individual’s power of creativity and transformation influencing the processes of urban change.

The fence between the cells is left bare, they are not painted, and the substance paint is not applied on it but it resembles a fence. The space of ambiguity that make us believe in what is not there encourages us to think about the possibilities of deconstructing the barriers, frontiers; the sign for differences. The new field is fluid and open, during the relation the space is charged transforming it into a ‘new place’ - where something can happen.

Final

Taking the practice of walking as the subject of artistic intervention, I have tried to underline some concerns about my practice in relation to my mental responses since my childhood to today’s experiences of different cultural and geographical spaces. My learning’s and responses tried to determine not only my ideological and practical states but also, the attempt to develop new formal fields.

“...the mutability of the individual life journey. In particular his move from one culture to another sharpened the riddle of the connection between the directly-felt and the historically-constructed, in the workings of our consciousness...”³

The fluidity of my movements acted and interacted with in different discourses and formal modes, trying to create disturbances triggering a state of rupture within hierarchical mechanisms. The artist as a social observer is already in the center and is able to move between the spaces accordingly to the processes that she wants to represent. Therefore, during these experiences, I am trying to be attentive to the particularities that characterise each situation in the ‘new spaces’, and adjust mechanisms for different relation. I am working as a mediator between the different sides of the “invisible membrane” acting in the interplay between the physical and experiential transformation of the urban environment.

My new experiences; generated by the dialogues and relations in these processes of interactions; revealed new modes for self-realization in the different socio realities. Thus, my adventures and experiences evoked ‘new spaces’ for positive alternative forms of conviviality and sociability.

The new expressions generated by the integration of people in my encounters were achieved by the power and creativity of relations and also, by the necessity of new forms of subjectivity to create a state of liberation that opens up awareness for the possibilities of change, renovation and self-realizations.

In conclusion, I hope it can be seen how these various projects, based and practiced in London today, are nevertheless, directly motivated and subsequently re-inform, my initial and autobiographical political perspectives - as set out above.

Giacomo Picca
January 2008

³ Guy Brett “Our Roots are our Branches”, text for exhibition catalogue - *Trees for the Wood* - Giacomo Picca, Gallery 32, London, 2003.