

Glen Lowry, Henry Tsang and M. Simon Levin speaking at Centre A Vancouver International Centre for Contemporary Asian Art Artist Talk held November 26, 2011

Henry Tsang

Thanks to Centre A, Makiko, Coast Salish / Unceded Territory, and Trevor Boddy who first started telling this story years ago and in turn set off the trajectory that we have been following since.

Maraya Project Components

Since 2007, the Maraya Project has been exploring the phenomenal mobility of new forms of urban waterfront luxury development, in particular the migration of Vancouver's Concord Pacific Place in False Creek to what has become the Dubai Marina in the UAE.

This exhibition is the culmination of seven visits to Dubai for research, documentation and collaboration between these two disparate yet uncannily similar sites. For the Centre A exhibition, we are presenting eight distinct but interrelated components:

- 1) Photographs
- 2) Videos
- 3) Halliburton Cases - Prototypes
- 4) Online Platform (www.marayaprojects.com)
- 5) social media campaign via FB, Twitter, online platform
- 6) public programs
- 7) electronic billboard
- 8) transit shelter posters (10 unique prints)

The photographs were taken 2007-2011 in Vancouver and Dubai, all in/along/near False Creek and the Dubai Marina. They are combined (with one exception) to compare, contrast and complement the similarities and differences between sites separated by 12 time zones or by a false body of water: in Vancouver's case, by name, and in Dubai, an artificial marina carved out of the desert.

The video footage in the wall projection was shot from a boat that followed the False Creek seawall and the Marina Walk in Dubai 3 years apart: in 2008 and again in 2011.

Using a split screen format, two places (Vancouver / Dubai) or times (2008 / 2011) are simultaneously presented. A computer program switches between these times and locations that make up the 12 possible combinations (see below), then repeats. The rhythm of the switching is based on a musical structure that evokes the melancholy of these controlled and restrictive environments: 12 bar blues in 12/8 time at 160 bpm, repeating after 8 verses.

The two floor projections create a bird's eye view of the city, or perhaps the perspective of an urban planner, master-planning architect, developer or domestic worker. The videos were shot from numerous rooftops and balconies overlooking the seawall/Marina Walk, some of which were part of penthouse suites. These views are not only breathtaking for their scope but also for their privilege and restrictive access. These are views that few who inhabit the city can experience, and given how many of these condominiums are seldom occupied, magnify both the fullness and emptiness of these towers.

Halliburton cases are renowned not only for appearing in hundreds of Hollywood movies often filled with unmarked cash or weapons, but originally for their ruggedness in having to endure rough travel through Texas oil fields. In the 1950s, the Zero Corporation acquired the luggage division of Halliburton, after which it became Zero Halliburton; it has since been acquired by ACE, a Japanese manufacturer. In the meantime, Halliburton has grown to be the second largest oilfield services company in the world, with many activities in the Middle East,

most notably (and controversially) in Iraq after the US invasion. It has dual headquarters in Houston and Dubai.

The Maraya Halliburton cases are installed with screens, computers, sensors and antennae. They are prototypes that, when completed, will be taken for walks along the seawall and placed in various locations where overhead cameras will stream live video from overhead of passers-by who stop to peer into the cases. The screens will play the live footage that switches between Maraya recorded videos as well as with cameras elsewhere along the seawall on False Creek and Dubai Marina. They will function as portable portals into another part of the city or another part of the world.

- Background: One question we are often asked is, what is the relationship between

Vancouver's False Creek and the Dubai Marina, and how did it happen? Stanley Kwok: involved in the urban regeneration of FC since 1981, first with the BC Place Corporation, with Expo '86, then after stepping down from BCPC, hired by Li Ka-Shing as the 1st Director of Concord Pacific until late 90s. After he stepped down from Concord, he was contacted with a former Concord staff that was working for Emaar in Dubai for ideas on how to develop a property between the old town and the Jebel Ali port. As it was landlocked, Stanley Kwok suggested they create their own waterfront by digging a channel around the adjacent shoreline property owned by their competitor Nakheel, and bringing the Persian Gulf into the desert. The similarities to Vancouver's False Creek post-Expo development were obvious. Emaar was sufficiently piqued by this proposal, and a team, including their president Mohamed Ali Malabar, visited Vancouver to see what Concord had done with their urban waterfront. They strolled the seawall walkway, they rode around in Concord CEO Terry Hui's yacht, and were so impressed that they returned with not only a plan to building something similar, but also with some key executives from Concord itself (the politics of which we are not privy to).

Blair Hagkull, one of the Concord staff who joined Emaar in Dubai, spoke about his experiences the other night at Am/Eugene's talk. He said that Emaar saw the potential in this project and how it might apply to their situation. Then they took key elements from False Creek, adapted them and further developed our model and expanded throughout ME, North Africa and South Asia, which speaks greatly to how cities are increasingly mobile and replicating themselves in oftentimes surprising places.

City Building from point of view of David Harvey's Right to the City and his analyses on neoliberalism; and Jurgen Habermas's Structural Transformation of the Bourgeois Public Sphere wherein he traces the rise of the middle class with the concomitant promise what might become a public sphere. Then the subsequent erosion through eventual dominance of private sector control over political and economic policy.

What is the seawall? Is it a street? Is it a sidewalk? What kind of space is this? Does it have the potential to be more than just a space of leisure? As a site of cultural production? Given the dearth of such spaces in Vancouver, what is public? Squares and plazas? Parks? Shopping centres?

- Is the seawall public? Who is the public, who isn't? Who gets access, who gets to stay, can you pitch a red tent and camp out, occupy it? Can it be more than for just passing exchanges, can it be a meeting place? Is there a possibility for social discourse and thereby some sort of public sphere to emerge?

Glen Lowry - Sites of passage.

In this talk I want to mention two key urban studies texts, both of which inform my thinking

About Maraya: our goals, methods, and productions.

Before I do, I would like to take a moment to thank Centre A, Makiko Hara, Jessica Hum, Debra Zhou, Christina Panis and Haema Sivanesan, for their on-going support. Makiko's initial enthusiasm for the project and commitment to the website and this exhibition is both gratifying and important to us. It is a privilege to have this work at Centre A, an ideal site for the Maraya's multifaceted platform.

I could go on for the remainder of my 15 minutes thanking all our friends, family and supporters without whom, as the saying goes this project would not be possible, but I want to wrap up my preamble by thanking my collaborating partners, Henry and Simon. Their creative and critical generosity has been vital to helping me shift not only the way I see Vancouver or cities, but more importantly how I might come to terms with the deeper methodological and ethical concerns underlying contemporary cultural criticism in this era of global urbanization and changing mediascapes. The opportunity to participate in the making of this work, and extended formal experimentation and visual research involved, has been absolutely crucial to helping me to think through the limits and possibilities of text-based criticism. Thank you.

That said, I now want to turn to two key texts. Old habits die hard, I guess. These are Michel de Certeau's "Walking in the City" and Jane Jacobs' *The Life and Death of Great American Cities* two canonical texts for those of us interested in the problem of cities (as Jacobs framed it). What I find most compelling about these two texts is how their basic premises falter in the context of 21st century city building. It's not only that they are entirely bound with an Euro-American conception of city life this is part of it but more than this, the dominant models they draw on no longer matter to the extent that they once did. To borrow an idea from Eugene McCann's Thursday evening talk, I would say that the urban assemblages they draw on no longer represent or reflect contemporary urban development and experience. de Certeau's *Lyon Paris New York* and Jacobs' *Baltimore Manhattan Toronto* based conceptions are hard pressed to make sense of the diversity of global urban megaprojects transforming literally dozens of cities beyond the old Euro-American trade routes: Shanghai, Shenzhen, Kuala Lumpur, Riyadh.

What is interesting, is that smaller cities like Vancouver and Dubai are actually as important as New York or London or Los Angeles in helping us to understand global movements. The appeal of Vancouver and Dubai, their branded and marketed appeal lies very close to the surface of their recent histories. A number of people have remarked on the fact that our images have very few human figures in them, little social life. In fact, it seems to me that their sparseness borrows from the visual vernacular of the architectural models we seek to engage. One might say that the photos are sprinkled with brightly colour human confections.

As opposed to the darker, heavier words on the page de Certeau describes. de Certeau's "Walking in the City" was part of *The Practice of Everyday Life*. This is a seminal text in de Certeau's thinking about the aporia of post war cultural theory and the relations of power. In this text, de Certeau writes from the perspective of looking down on Manhattan from the 110th floor of the World Trade Centre, He writes about the disconnect between gazing down on the city and reality of the people in the streets. Describing a tension between the strategies of urban developers and the tactics of the city dwellers, he writes of New York as a universe that is constantly exploding. In it are inscribed the architectural figure of the coincidental oppositum formerly drawn in miniature

and mystical textures. He goes on to write, On this stage of concrete, steel and glass, cut out between two oceans (the Atlantic and the American) by a frigid body of water, the tallest letters in the world compose a gigantic rhetoric of excess in both expenditure and production (92). Critical of the solar Eye, looking down like a god, in which the fiction of knowledge is related to this lust to be a viewpoint and nothing more, de Certeau has his critic, Icarus, fall back into the dark space where the crowds move back and forth. Crowds he points out that though visible from on high are themselves unable to see down below (93). Yet, as he has it, the ordinary practitioners of the city live down below, below the thresholds at which visibility begins. They walk... they are walkers, Wandersmanner, whose bodies follow the thick and thins of an urban text they write without being able to read it.

de Certeau writes The paths that correspond in this intertwining, unrecognized poems in which each body is an element signed by many others, elude legibility. The networks of these moving, intersecting writings compose a manifold story that has neither author nor spectator.

It is in this in between that Maraya moves. Pushing the limits of the spectral subject, the author of an urban theory or fiction of knowledge that would explain the type of city we yearn for finds itself down on the ground, among de Certeau's blind wandersmanner. Or walkers.

It is worth remembering that de Certeau's impossible vantage point no longer exists. The non-seeing that frames his conception of the city, is further deferred by a global politics that has transformed and eclipsed the US as the centre of urban life. While I don't want to belabour the symbolic and psychic importance of 9/11 on western, particularly North American scholars, I will point out that there is a direct link between the fall of the World Trade towers and the rise of Dubai. Awash in the repatriated Middle Eastern capital that was pulled out of New York and London directly after 9/11, Dubai made a name for itself in the following decade in many ways eclipsing America's gigantic rhetoric of excess (as de Certeau has it).

I scarcely need to remind people that in addition to a number of truly gigantic urban megaprojects mega megaprojects perhaps such as the Palms or the World, Dubai is home to the world's new tallest building. It is interesting to note that in this slide about the tallest buildings in the world, the majority was built after 9/11 and outside Europe and North America.

Jane Jacobs

The second text I'd like to touch on is Jane Jacob's 1961 *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. In particular, I'd like to point to Jacob's focus on sidewalks in this great drama.

For Jacobs, sidewalks are vital to the safety of the city because they are crucial to the management, or what we might now rather call interface, between strangers. In the 1950s, when Jacobs began writing about cities, cities were seen as dangerous places. The large-scale suburbanization and urban renewal projects that transformed North American life in the postwar decades were underwritten by racist anxieties about the nature/source of this fear and fueled by rhetorical statements about street-level crime. There was a tension between industrialization and the migration of labourers, particularly African Americans, into cities and the movement of the middle classes, particularly Whites, out toward the outskirts.

This is a well-documented history, and I touch on it only to highlight Jacobs' interest in sidewalks as a crucial component for the health of Great American cities. She makes the point that unlike suburbs or small town, cities are by

definition places where strangers meet, and this meeting, which is vital to the "life" of the city, happens on sidewalks.

Jacob's writes (I am quoting an entire paragraph here),
In the settlements that are smaller and simpler than big cities, controls on acceptable public behavior, if not on crime, seem to operate with great or lesser success through a web of reputation, gossip, approval, disapproval and sanctions, all of which are powerful if people know each other and word travels. But a city's streets which must control not only the behavior of the people of the city but also visitors from suburbs and towns who want to have a big time away from the gossip and sanctions at home, have to operate by more direct, straightforward methods. It is a wonder cities have solved such an inherently difficult problem at all and yet in many streets they do it magnificently. The way they do this, Jacobs suggests, depends on the three-fold function of the sidewalk to 1/ provide a clear demarcation between what is public space and what is private space, 2/ put eyes upon the street, and 3/ invite users on it fairly continuously. The involvement or participation of users is crucial: it adds more eyes to the mix and gives others something to look at, Jacob suggests.

Jacobs goes on to talk about how sidewalks create spaces of contact and congregation and finally how they are crucial to assimilating children. I think for most of us, Jacobs points are fairly clear, and probably now, more or less self-evident. But at the time they were leveled, they challenged dominant planning ideas that were threatening to evacuate the city centres, forces that did in fact win out in a number of North American cities. Jacobs's sidewalks provide an interesting and useful counterpoint to Malaya's focus on the seawall walkway or Marina walk as it is called along the Dubai Marina. The fact that the design of these pedestrian spaces are informed by some of the ideals proposed by Jacobs (particularly in relation to the predominance of walkway level town houses) is a key point of entrance into this model of urban space. More than this, as the urban waterfront takes hold of a global urban imaginary, these kinds of walkways will be expected to serve some of the key functions of city building. In fact in Vancouver and Dubai, the marina walkways are proposed as attractions, as sites that we might want to go to. In many ways they are the alternative to a network of urban sidewalks.

The problem is what do they do? Or better, where can the seawall take us? With this question in mind, Maraya decided to camp out on the seawall, as it were. In fact, we have spent serious amounts of time living on the Dubai Marina and walking the walkways in both cities, trying to come to terms with their promise and their limitations. In many ways, our creative process and productions exist in and for these spaces.

The Haliburton case is a prototype, and it is our sincere intention to find a way to get the cases out onto the marina walkways in both cities at the same time. In so doing, we are looking to activate the spaces through meetings (contact) and dialogues. Our photos and video can be read as documentation of these walkway meetings and/or our own form of social performance. More than this, we are taking up the promise of both cities, or of their planners, to ask what kind of urban life might these spaces allow us to create. Is the seawall more than a bike path, jogging path, or roller rink?

So then what are these things called seawalls or marina walkway? What or who are we supposed to watch as we perambulate around them? Is there more to the future of these cities than somewhat meaningless obsessions with leisure and yachting? What types of commerce, industry, and meeting do we seek collectively?

On Thursday, Blair Haigull, who is one of the Concord developers who went to Dubai in 2000, talked about the fact that Dubai officials see that they have built a city in 10 years, an amazing feat and one that foreshortens the

accomplishments of the Vancouver model they built on. His statement frames the question or provocation proposed by Am Johal and Eugene McCann: how many years until the city is living and dynamic until civil society takes hold of the seawall?

Malaya's interest in this metaphorical marina walk linking Vancouver and Dubai halfway around the world is posed as a response to a 21st century obsession with safety and security. The links between Canada and the UAE are very much affected by global insecurity and war. Vancouver's Centerm shipping terminal was bought by Dubai World Port following a movement in the US congress to block Arab investors from controlling US ports. In an interesting reversal, direct flights to Dubai from Seattle might be seen as response to the Harper Government's bureaucratic bungling of relations with UAE around Emirates Air. It is also useful to link this moment of global insecurity to situation around Camp Mirage. In a sense the patterns of neighbourliness we propose are meetings of among strangers, meeting that as Jane Jacobs and Michel de Certeau suggest, are crucial to the life of the city. It as a process of making strange us to ourselves a form of ostranenie that Maraya enters the dramatic, and always already political, space of city thinking. This installation, the talks, future installations (in Dubai and elsewhere), the website, and public artwork are a staged as an extended platform or meeting place sidewalk or marina walk flanking and staging a global movement of people and ideas, strangers and not-so strangers.

M. Simon Levin

In my part of this talk I am going to try to thread a number of tropes, devices and strategies that have emerged out of our 5 year artistic collaboration to give you some insight into how we are thinking about this work and how they might help instrumentally in our provocation.

I will try to extend some of Eugene McCann investigation of the mirror, of the idea of looking down in an embodied way and the intermittent appearance in the diptychs and video projection and the physical presence within this installation of the zero-Haliburton case.

So as Henry has said Maraya derives from an Arabic word that connects the words mirror reflection and mirage. And so right there we are cued to think about the accuracy of reflection and how it is determined by its surface materiality.

Eugene on Thursday asked some good questions about mirrors and revealed fundamentally that mirrors are ok at giving an approximation of likeness but more often then not they tend to give an inquiring mind a chance to pause and reflect on its distortion and as we have continually talked about throughout this project we look at similarities to see differences.

If we imagine the idea of a mirage and how it is characterized in many literary, visual and cinematic art forms, it is filled with a distorted yearning, a hope and longing for something imaginary.

What are we longing for when we find out that someone has copied us, our buildings, our space and surrounds. Credit, flattery, acknowledgement?

In the story of Narcissus, one that most of us know, Nemesis who is charged with maintaining a divine justice and balance she is a retributive goddess punishes the beautiful Narcissus for ignoring his admirers for not recognizing their love because of his hubris, his arrogance. She lures the hunter Narcissus to a pool, whereby he gets caught in his own self-love. He is an indentured looker Narcissus got locked in his own gaze as is revealed by Carravagio and doesn't

respond to the overtures of the wood nymph echo. She physically fades away left with only a reverberation of waves and he dies a lonely death.

It is a cautionary tale of being unaware of lacking self-knowledge and the ability for deep self-reflection.

A provocation for criticality and questioning of self.

The mirror helps us look at our surface similarities but ultimately it asks us as makers and you as viewers to reveal the distortions, the complexities in this relationship.

As Eugene said on Thursday it reflects light and gaze. The mirror allows us through our positioning to extend our view in ways that move us outside our human centred viewing, we can see behind, to the side and potentially see in more directions than one a distortion of our particular viewing bias. It is a mimetic device that reflects us and away from us.

So this then leads to talk about our strategies of embodiment and why we ask you to look down and why we look down as a means of changing the perspective of our gaze. Like the early photographs of Rodchenko, Nadar before him and Strand, these views disrupt the terrestrial based viewing. We literally see a perspective that is disorienting, destabilizing.

They are the views as Henry has said of gods and Master planners, of the construction workers and of absentee penthouse owners and their domestic workers. It is a privileged view that comes with a certain responsibility, it is also voyeuristic in nature as it allows a form of concealed viewing.

When hung on the wall they are normalized and as we see so many Google map views they are less striking in a discomfoting way. But when they are on the floor the vertiginous effect of feeling the floor move under our feet our balance is put into question.

The bowed head stance is one that we can find in many cultures and religions as a symbol of humility, of becoming humble. It connotes paying respect. It is experienced physically as a slight strain. The neck pulls, the back eventual aches. The viewer is less balanced and there is the potential of falling or needing to step back to gain stability. The tension lies in watching something that isn't natural in its orientation and yet being forced to be conscious of one's own body you are aware of your looking.

So that unlike our friend Narcissus we are asked to be aware of our embodied self in a way to implicate us within this form of city looking city building. We watch these patterns of neighbourliness as we would people watch and sometimes we might see ourselves through a certain ubiquitous daily action or being implicated by the person who looks back up at us and breaks our privileged anonymity.

Lacan's mirror stage: within child development the point where a child recognizes that his reflection is part of him but separate. The birth of libidinal desire of responding emotionally and somatically to an image of oneself.

The enactment of subject-object relations and how we identify with a more whole version of our fragmented selves and in so doing alienates from our actual selves, We take on the imaginary order

The cases a symbol of the flow of global capital. Mobilities theory and the flow of money, people and ideas. As a trope it asks us how we might imagine that a city, a neighbourhood is exported, imported, borrowed or stolen? This how the reflection, the mirroring and the mirage are captured and revealed.

The McGu" n, is a term Hitchcock used to talk about a cinematic device that helps pull the viewer in by engaging them within a figurative form (some papers, a glove) that the viewer is piqued by and asking them to follow it. It is way to move a narrative along, so that other plot points emerge.

Maraya Invite Image: Robert Ferry with Haliburton staring at the cell phone within a sea of sand.

What does it mean to walk a seawall where here is there? To see forms which appear similar but different within the specifics of their location? These pairings of imagery reveal forms that both sculpt our projected imaginings of our built environment and inform how that environment is lived and how we have all implicitly constructed it into being. As a series of replications, these 21st century Urban Spaces support global capitalism's need to reproduce both its power structure and its likeness, yet we are the individuals and communities that walk these pathways, that gain agency and meaning through the perambulation of these remade and thus reinterpreted forms.

When we see our selves reflected in these spaces, we are both aware of the larger conditions of a global mirroring and naive to the intricacies and nuances specific to each passerby. These simultaneous experiences, whether here or there, can be seen as patterns of neighbourliness not just the designed layout of the neighbourhood but of how they are performed on, activated in and connected to within the everyday movements of our meanderings. Seen primarily from above they thwart the horizon centred view of our landscape or the implied reverence of gazing up at our edifices, allowing a position that suggests the security of privilege and/or the disembodied position of criticality

The silver case? Why do we see it being shuttled through these spaces and what is in it? As a trope, this is a carried container a vessel that houses and regulates the flow of capital and its likeness. Borrowed from popular culture, it nods to the speculative value of money, contraband, people and their repurposed ideas, suggesting perhaps that the likeness of a neighbourhood and its social relations might be caught and carried within these walks only to be released elsewhere . That walking with this case, is to constantly shift and move this technologized-mirror of sorts, looking for a specialized place of exchange. A spot that allows us a glimpse into the replicating power of our built environments and in our very human actions that themselves are copied and remade. Our downward gaze probes into these portable portals searching for the recognizable and familiar and yet ultimately destabilizing our sense of place. In these moments of dislocation we are left no option but to question where here is? And why there is here?

Maraya, borrowing the Arabic word for mirror and reflection asks us all to engage in the remaking of our seawalls. To explore the thousands of images that chronicles the building of both waterfront communities from 2007-2011, building digital paths and connections between publics both here and there. Our online platform allows every viewer and contributor the ability to personalize (remix) each glance, each step, each paver, creating paired images that together delineate a metaphorical seawall that spans the globe. Within these user generated articulations images are repurposed, connections made, commonalities revealed. These are the true moments and spots of exchange.