

Artist Statement

Bambang Toko

Crowded, that was the first word popped up in my mind when I arrived in New Delhi, India. I imagined before that New Delhi was similar with Jakarta, but it turned out to be bigger and more packed. In the first days I travelled around the town to check out the public spaces and public art practices in Delhi. It startled me and made me wonder to see that there were so many public space there that are not well mentioned and there were almost know public art practices done by artists, most of them were usually statues or monuments that were commission works, not pure individual work by artist. I did not also see street art practices such as murals, graffiti or even spontaneous spray paint scabbles. What I saw most of the time on the walls in the flyover pillars of the city were advertising posters, wither in good condition or already worn out. On the other hand, I was amazed by the fact that there were so many activities of art performances (wither done for religius purposes or other reasons) conducted in public spaces almost every day. It remaindered me of the public art scene in Jogjakarta(my city) that is full of murals and graffiti practices, which for me was also possible to be done in Delhi. This is also because I was invited to join a series of special artist in residence program for public art. I could begin to realize that idea in this program.

After doing a one month survey on public spaces in Delhi and also some strategic time planning to work for only half a month, I then decided to use the city public transportation as the medium of my work. I chose Tempo because I want my work to be seen by a broader range of public. The next issue was what kind of images that I would show on the Tempo. I wanted the images to be understood by everyone in New Delhi but it also had a deliver my massage clearly, that which I had to figure out. As far as I know, India is very well-known far its Bollywood movie, so then I did a brief research on the attachment of the society in New Delhi Bollywood movies. It turned out that from primary school students to the elder citizen were such avid fans of the Bollywood stars and movies and they spontaneously sang the songs right way when I mentioned one of the film tittles. So then, I decided to use the face of two very famous Bollywood movie stars, Aishwarya Rai and Kareena Kapoor as the images on the tempo, which I paired with my own face, as if they added with texts that say “I love you tomorrow” and “I love you sometimes”. The public certainly recognize the faces of Aish and Kareena but who was the face beside them? They must have been curious.

When I started to do this work with stencil graffiti technique on 3 Tempos, I received enthusiastic responses from the audiences (people who lives around the area where I made my work). They asked to be pictured in front to the images of Aish and Kareena, and there were some who even kissed the images.

This event created a lasting impression for me not only because the way they appreciated my work but also afterwards they treated me so friendly for that. Some people even treated me jae and whisky. In making these work I was assisted a lot by Hemant, Gambeer and all the staff at KHOJ. I even managed to teach Aarun and..... Some stencil graffiti technique.

Before I came back to Indonesia, I took some chance to make some stencil graffiti works on the rolling doors of the phone kiosk owned by Gambeer. I also made stencil graffiti images of the faces of all KHOJ staff.

I would like to give some input about these residency program upon the job range of Hemant as the coordinator. I think his work is overloaded, which raised my sympathy for him it would be better if he could have another person to help.

Sukriya

Helmut Dick-

In August / September 2006 I accepted the invitation of KHOJ International Artists' Association and participated in their Public Arts Residency Programme in New Delhi, India. A group of 5 artists were invited to spend 6 weeks in Delhi. Resisting the temptation as much as possible to just spend our time exploring this amazing city, we were asked to develop and realise a project in the public space of Delhi. Besides myself, Bambang "Toko" Witjaksono from Jogjakarta, Indonesia; Jasmeen Patheja from Bangalore, India; Mohammad Ali Talpur from Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan; and Navjot Altaf from Mumbai, India were participating. With this choice of artists KHOJ selected a very diverse group where the cultural backgrounds and the different working strategies caused an interesting exchange and discourse on many levels. In order to advance the communication process, discussion-rounds were regularly held. They were organised and led by Takahiro Noguchi who was our "critic in residence". Beside these meetings, the fact that most of the participants lived in the same apartment created plenty of additional opportunities for discourse. Talks about different artistic attitudes and aims naturally flowed into exchanges and explanations of cultural differences.

One very special alliance that occurred in the course of this process, was the way how Ali Talpur and I "protected" each other on our trips through Delhi. Ali (potentially local) helped me with his presence or simply by speaking Hindi at the right moment. On the other hand Ali (as a Pakistani) was quite worried about being controlled by the local police (in the beginning of our residency there was a situation where this fear was actually justified...) So he felt more safe wandering around with me, because it would be very unusual for an terrorist from Pakistan to be accompanied by a white European.

I realised that this strong experience of being a tourist and stranger in an overwhelming city like Delhi was indeed becoming one of the starting points for my new work. Together with the fact that I had been invited to spread my artist-ego over the public domain in a culture that I encountered for the first time, made my decision complete: "33 Helmut Dicks are visiting New Delhi".

Together with another 32 Helmut Dicks, I was driven to different locations around Delhi where I started to unload the 32 life-size cardboard figures. They were "wearing" the same clothes as I was and had slightly confused and amazed looking facial expressions. It took between 30 - 45 minutes to arrange these cardboard Helmut Dicks in a big group. After I hung out with "my selves" for a while, I reloaded "us" back into the transport vehicle. The work appeared at Natjaf Khan's tomb (Sept. 10), at Nehru Place (Sept. 12) and at Sheik Sarai Community Center (Sept. 15). This tourist-group of myself raised a lot of questions and speculations. Here a selection of comments given by passers-by...

- young man in his mid-twenties: "Is this man a political leader? Which party is he representing?" (Nehru Place, Sept. 12)

- a young boy: "Why has he made so many of himself ? He is not like Hritik Roshan (Indian movie star), he is not that good looking." (Nehru Place, Sept. 12)

- man approx. 30 years old: "I am on my way to go to the publisher and I am already late, but I want to see this...I will tell my boss that the publisher was closed.....I think what we see here is "ache jaguar hee" - a quick method to become very famous in India. (Nehru Place, Sept. 12)

- a 10 year old boy: "This uncle has not changed his clothes even once!" (Najaf Khan's tomb, Sept. 10)

- several men talking together: "These Englishman come to India, make stupid actions, and then they will show it back home and become famous..." (Nehru Place, Sept. 12)

- a young man who had lived in Europe: "Do you know what 'Ausländer' (German word for foreigner) means....do you really know that?...what would happen if I would do this in your country?...what do you think?...how would the people in your country respond to me....?" (Sheik Sarai Community Centre, Sept. 15)

- 23-year-old man: "And what are we supposed to do now?" (Sheik Sarai Community Centre, Sept. 15)

- a retired government clerk, approx. 50 years old: "This artist has tried to create more bodies of himself in order to do gods' good work....like in the avtaras (Hindu mythology of reincarnation). (Najaf Khan's tomb, Sept. 10)

me ?" The stickers were spread via the popular motor-rickshaw. The second category, also including my work, were public interventions that work with the transformation of familiar structures and objects without providing a linear or clearly explainable purpose. This alteration of the "known" aims to cause subtle frictions in people's explanation patterns and suggests extended or different possible realities. Bambang "Toko" Witjaksono used ordinary transport-vehicles for his work. He spray-painted the vehicles with images that showed him together with popular Indian movie actresses. By doing their daily rounds the vehicles carried his work out in the city. Mohammad Ali Talpur used the local television to place an ad to find a missing person: he used a photo and a description of himself.ΨThe shameless extension of a likeness that we find in political campaigns is as well known as the digital effect of multiplying in science fiction movies. When this aesthetic is used by a character that seems unworthy of being duplicated, and it appears in an ordinary reality (for Delhi circumstances) the familiar becomes suddenly intangible. The strategy and the outcome of my work was part of one of the fundamental and obvious differences between the artists that have been invited for the residency. The work of the participants could be roughly divided in two categories. Some of us were engaged with forms of "community art", meaning work that is made together with certain groups with the aim to create an impact (often an improvement) in or around these groups. For example the work that Jasmeen Patheja made during her residency. She gathered groups of people via the internet and organised public actions that alerted passers-by to the issue of sexual harassment in the streets of Indian cities. Navjot Altaf tried to start a discussion-process about the relationship that inhabitants of Delhi have with their city. She collected different quotes and published this material on stickers including a "Delhi

More information and images of the work described above you can find at: http://khojworkshop.org/project/public_art_residency_06

All the work of the participants was carried out and organised at KHOJ studios. KHOJ provided simple atelier-spaces and an office unit with telephone and internet. They also provided guides and people that helped with organising material and construction. Later on assistance with executing and documenting the work at the different locations was arranged. Although I had to get used to the different quality that “organising” implies in a city like New Delhi all in all I was satisfied with support that KHOJ offered.

Getting to know my colleagues and following their different working-processes was in most cases a great pleasure. Further there were plenty of possibilities to get an impression from ongoing art activities in Delhi. KHOJ provided us regularly with information about the latest activities and exhibitions.

The fact that I was able to organise and realise a work in a public space of New Delhi brought me in an extraordinary and crazy way in contact with the local culture that never would be possible as a normal visitor. I enjoyed my residency at KHOJ, it was very special experience that I can only recommend.

My special thanks again to the KHOJ- team, the Goethe Institut New Delhi, Fonds BKVB and everybody that helped making possible that 33 Helmut Dicks visited New Delhi.

P.S. in the scope of the exhibition “Beings and Doings” documentation of my work was shown at the gallery of the British Council in March 2007 in New Delhi.

Navjot Altaf

DELHI LOVES ME ?

I am interested in ‘Public Art’ that emphasizes a process of engagement with issues, and when the work emerges out of extended dialogical and personal interaction with the groups of people and individuals; the dialogue becomes two-way and interactive which respects and invites multiple points of views.

At the time when invited to be part of ‘Public Art Project –2006’ from KHOJ, Delhi government’s dream / plan / action to transform the city into an international city with international standards of public and privately owned spaces was going on in full swing and was often discussed in the media – a number of bastis were being dislocated to vacate the prime locations. Preparing for the Common Wealth games to be held in Delhi in the coming years has been another reason for clearing certain locations – by displacing the poor to far away under developed sites without any basic facilities.

Since I do not live in Delhi - for DELHI LOVES ME ? – I chose a location around Khirki where KHOJ is situated. People / communities living in Khirki and Hauze Rani to an extent are aware of KHOJ Studios and to begin with could relate to - where I was coming from.

These habitants primarily migrants from different socio – cultural backgrounds work in all kinds of fields including driving auto rickshaws and taxis- quite a few have migrated permanently but most depend on temporary jobs on a daily basis. Since, right from the beginning on my part, there was a dialogical approach, through initial meetings and then

during the process of discussions and interviews (over the period) with the groups and individuals; people got interested in sharing their experiences and it encouraged communication between us about their lives in the city of Delhi, its politics/policies of development/law and order/short-term thoughtless problem solving tactics of the planners and the implications /actions on quality of human life and environment. Since most of the participants have roots in the villages the discussion also revolved around the villages in many states not being developed enough to provide job opportunities to the youth or not having proper irrigation system for the farmers especially when the monsoons fail. And around the issue of working class people / migrants dealing with the uncertainty of their present and future work situation and their relationship and nostalgia with the city of Delhi, they have been for generations, coming to the city - primarily for livelihood out of compulsion and in some cases to experience life and work 'outside' their immediate environment. Meeting with the members of Bhartiya Labour Union in Hauze Rani I learnt about the changing work possibilities in private and public sectors and the role agents play in the lives of the laborers.

The text - I L O V E D E L H I / I L O V E I N D I A / I L O V E B O M B A Y on the stickers , T-shirts ,Caps , toys, mugs etc is popular but through the process of dialogical interaction emerged the counter text - D E L H I L O V E S M E ? . Which enacted people and some of them, now participants with critical approach, consciously / subconsciously started narrating / composing poetry / shairi individually / jointly related to questions relevant to their lives and the targeted communities in Delhi. At this point we realized the possibilities of developing an aesthetic structure – jointly.

Ideas of images, text and poetry which developed from the consistent communication between some of the community people and Rikkimi (student of art and aesthetics / participant)and myself were selected mutually to be transferred on to stickers, planned to be installed on auto rickshaws plying all over the city at one level. And then approaching the auto rickshaw drivers to know their response to the idea of carrying the installed stickers from one area in Delhi to another. During the process of working out the aesthetics of the stickers, participants understanding / opinion of how (once installed on the Auto Rickshaws) people in general would respond to the selection of poetry / shairi on the photographic images of the specific locations in Khirki and Hauze Rani prepared on photoshop with the help of Manoj (printer) and Rikkimi, I regularly was in touch with the interested participants from the locality and their ideas / sense of aesthetics was keenly / seriously taken into consideration as well as of those who remained with the project throughout. What emerged is a different way of thinking about the purpose of artwork in totality. This is not just a case of a final product or object to which all else is preliminary.

With 25,000 printed stickers (12 different ones) we met Auto Rickshaw Union near I I T premises for their response and support to approach rickshaw drivers in the city. With the support and participation of three auto rickshaw drivers, art students, artists, community persons, and a volunteer from KHOJ -on three consecutive days we approached the drivers while they waited to fill gas at CNG petrol pumps at various places and at auto rickshaw stands in Delhi. Since we believed that listening is the beginning of communication we individually or in groups listened to their responses / reactions to the stickers as many of them took time to read the text before they conveyed their consent or refusal to let us install the stickers on the back of their auto rickshaws. They had many questions - such as what do artists gain from such a process and who is funding the project? Even though most of them liked the aesthetics of the stickers especially the text on them, they had not heard of ' Public

Art ' as an art practice. But saw it as a move to include common man and his / her views in the art making process. As generally work of art is associated with a gallery / museum space.

Since the drivers, many of them migrants belonged to different socio-cultural backgrounds and responded differently to different stickers and the text, it was significant to observe and know their views on the issue of migration, their struggle to survive, advantages / disadvantages of migrating to big cities, rapidly growing inflation, State government's future plans to stop auto- rickshaws from the roads in Delhi, and commuters attitudes towards the drivers at odd hours etc. Along with the stickers we gave each person a slip with KHOJ address on it, inviting him or her to send their views or poetry on the subject. Some in different locations participated in composing lines linked to their experiences in the city and its politics and handed it over to us. And a few expressed their perception of art / artists and the relationship between the viewer and the artist and the process itself by appreciating artist's interest and engagement with the public. Apart from the ones who contributed to the realization of the project or rickshaw drivers who participated in action that traveled, permeating parts of the city, viewers in this case also included those who saw and read the text (on the stickers) on the moving rickshaws or while waiting at traffic lights. Stickers installed in the southern part of Delhi could be seen in the east / west /north of Delhi.

Stages of the process of meetings / discussions / response to the counter text concept - D E L H I L O V E S M E ? , different people reciting poetry / shairi in Khirki and Hauze Rani areas was (audio) recorded and interaction / communication with the auto drivers / observers and installing of the stickers by the above mentioned team at some of the CNG gas pumps / auto stands / railway stations / and traffic lights was documented (video) with mutual consent, the documented audio recording and video footage (rough edit) and stickers were played / projected and shown on the outer wall of KHOJ Studios (facing the street) on the 'open day' for the community persons / artists / visitors to see and hear the whole process at different levels. Since the participants in the project were now the audiences / viewers as well, there was a keen interest in the work and some who could not hear their recorded voices / conversations (due to technical problems) and had to wait the entire evening expressed their disappointment. If some had questions regarding the reasons for technical problems, others were engaged in listening to their own and other familiar / unfamiliar voices (from the neighborhood) and commented on the accessibility /similarities and differences of thoughts and points of view based on their lived experiences and observations.

Being with the participants / audiences 'out side' KHOJ premises made me realize the integrity of their participation / contribution and interest. For me, how the entire process brought a number of people into conversation at various stages / levels itself is a work of art. To understand this work and the situation in a larger context is to recognize that process and all associated activities.

Audiences from Khirki and Hsautz Rani were disappointed with KHOJ once again for not permitting them to enter the premises on the 'open day' to see works installed inside by other four participating artists in Public Art Project - 2006 . As from time to time they too had been interacting with the residents of the area at various levels.

Critique : I believe in KHOJ and its efforts to challenge the cultural conservatism. But I feel that we are continuously confronted with the hard facts of neglect / that nothing is taken care of on its own. public art needs a language to articulate its compatibility. Critical language needs to be evolved. Since invited group of artists have been engaged with such an art practice, in a workshop space, apart from the projects that artists undertook, there was a lack

of interest in theoretical debate within the group including the critic in residence. Difference was visible between the projects that were developed in a private space independent of people's participation prior to the actual events and those which were developed through the process of physical and dialogical interaction /people's contribution /shared experiences and visions. Yet there was hardly any exchange between the artists or debate provoked by the critic who was introduced to the artists to do so. But each planned meeting to discuss questions posed when it comes to Public Art / collaboration etc, based on participants own experiences and public art as an art practice in a larger context, either got cancelled or delayed leaving no time for any formal / serious debate .At an individual level there may have been some exchange taking place but it was never made into a group discussion. Since very little has been theorized or written on such an art practice in India I believe that these are the moments when the difference in approaches / choices and understandings of art practice like public art of different artists from different countries / contexts could be foregrounded, instead, too much emphasis was on the success of the technical efficiency / aesthetic appeal; where as intensive, multidisciplinary art making /art practice in which the participant / viewer's physical and conscious interaction was integral to the process throughout, was not understood / discussed keenly even after the open day final discussion amongst the five participants, the critic and the KHOJ representative. Nor interested participants / viewers from Khirki waiting outside to watch the projection were respected by the KHOJ staff. Requirement of a technical person to check the wrong video equipment to begin projection in time was totally ignored until much after the opening.

As far as DELHILOVESME ? is concerned, documentation itself was the work not the stickers alone .The process till the stickers meant to be installed on auto rickshaws got printed - was phase 1 - which further created grounds for a dialogue with rickshaw / taxi drivers and the observers at different locations outside Khirki and Hauze Rani areas . Hence, participant's (from Khirki and Hauze Rani) interest to view the entire process through the documented material on the open day needed to be recognized / respected. To further invite them for a dialogue / critical understanding / approach to public art , any dialogue between the artist and the participant / viewer whose contribution was integral to the process was crucial at the time when both artist and the participant / viewer heard and watched the documentation of the entire process together. Facts of neglect in this case reduced the time for - this phase of a ' dialogical exchange' .

On the other hand at the same time inside KHOJ premises the art world viewer was being entertained as in a private / gallery space.

N a v j o t A l t a f