Genealogies; CONDITIONS

Edited by Alex Martinis Roe

AUTHORSHIP

PARTICIPATION

Edited by
Alex Martinis Roe
This second issue of the *Genealogies;* series is published on the occasion of the exhibition of Alex Martinis Roe’s installation *Genealogies; Frameworks for Exchange* (2011-12) as part of Post-planning, curated by Bala Starr for the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne.

Martinis Roe’s five-part project was first curated by Gavin Murphy in 2011 as a solo exhibition at Pallas Projects, Dublin, a workshop at Dublin City Gallery The Hugh Lane, a publication and an archive. The Frameworks for Exchange Workshop on Genealogies and Spaces Between Authorships was held again in 2012 as a precursor to this second exhibition of the project at the Ian Potter Museum of Art.

Preceding each *Genealogies;* exhibition, an email is sent out to the host institution’s networks. Attached to this email is a scanned catalogue of index cards documenting the various elements and events of the *Genealogies;* project to date. The exhibition at Pallas Projects was accompanied by the first in this series of publications, *Genealogies; Frameworks for Exchange,* edited by Gavin Murphy and Alex Martinis Roe. A box file archive of additional material is catalogued as part of the permanent collection of the Goethe Institut Library. Another box file containing copies of the initial material and spare worksheets from the workshop in Melbourne is catalogued and available in the Special Collections of the Baillieu Library at the University of Melbourne.
SPECIFIC RELATIONS
Vivian Zihler

This essay is the second in a series. It is a point of articulation within an extending texture of practice facilitated—and yes authored, but elusively so—by the artist Alex Martinis Roe. It is part of her work, yet it is not her work per se. We share this space of conjoined distinction along with many others. The work, assembled under the title Genealogies; proceeds in cycles, gathering protagonists in various configurations of feminist conversation. Fragments from the cycle’s first phase reside in an archival box file, in a library, in a chapter of the Goethe Institut, in Dublin. These four spaces are distinct, and yet the archive resides within them all. Not included, perhaps not yet included, is a video fragment that holds an allegorical relation to the whole. The footage of the fragment institutes a pause, a space between, and in so doing it points to two critical trajectories within the Genealogies; cycle. The first is the enfolding of the spaces of art, and the relocation of the decisive moment of art from the solitude of the studio to the shared and relational space of reception. The second is a tendency toward an exquisite specificity, through which the edges of the art encounter can be explored.

The video fragment is part of a conversation, one in a series of conversations, held during the cycle’s first phase titled Genealogies; Frameworks for Exchange. According to the parameters of the piece, the conversation was held between a participant (the Portuguese artist Carla Cruz) and a female figure that she had nominated as an influence (the North American political theorist Jodi Dean). Over Skype the two discuss participation, democracy and the formation of “the public”; yet it is an unspoken component of the conversation that momentarily holds attention. Mid-way through the recording there is a one-minute long pause in conversation. As the seconds dilate to a palpable duration, the specificity of the spaces framed in the video shifts into focus. On the left Cruz waits in an institutional office, white-walled and with an evacuation plan stuck to its door. On the right, an empty chair stands in front of a kitchen bench that is populated with domestic items; a cast-iron pot, a clock, and some books. Taking in both screens at once, a small red square pulses in the top left corner marking a third, digital layer; one that stretches as a membrane across the two and forms the surface encountered by the viewer. At the end of the untimed, unplanned minute’s silence, Dean re-enters the frame, takes her seat, takes a drink from a ceramic mug and the conversation (re)commences.

This layering of space—office, kitchen, conversation and display—is emblematic of the operations enacted within Martinis Roe’s Genealogies; cycle. In a broader lens, the spaces enfolded throughout the cycle are those of art itself; classically given in tripartite as the space of generation.
Prefiguring the exhibition in Dublin were six index cards, each citing the details of six different spaces encompassed by the work to that date. The first declares a meeting between Martinis Roe and the philosopher Luce Irigaray that occurred in Paris in 2011. By this, and from the outset, space within the Genealogies; cycle is configured as shared, as space between. The second and third index cards note the coordinates in time and space of conversations among participants, much like that of Cruz and Dean. The fourth card notes a Workshop on Genealogies and Spaces Between Authorships (2011), held parallel to the exhibition in Dublin. The fifth records the exhibition itself, and the sixth card notes the archive, its date, location and accessibility. Through the precise referential device of the index card, an equivalence is conferred among these spaces. Generation, display, and storage are layered as tissues, together forming the texture of the piece.

Not only is the space of art folded throughout the cycle, it is reconfigured; recast as an area of encounter among multiple protagonists, as a field of exploratory relations. Key to this is a reconceptualisation of the gallery, is a shift in emphasis from its function as a site of display to its shared condition as a site of reception. In this way, visitors to the Dublin exhibition were met with A Proposal for Future Meetings (2011), a work that solicited just that; posed as a table, two chairs, and a letter inviting visitors to nominate a female
author (theorist, artist or any other producer of texts) that she, or he, would like to be paired with in conversation. To emphasise the gallery as a site of reception is to implicate its shared and social dimension, imbricating art in dense networks of interest and influence, and accounting for a shared generation and assignation of meaning. As such, the field of protagonists within the art encounter is cast open, acknowledging the complex confluence of artists, curators, critics, audiences, assistants, spouses, financiers etc. This shift in visibility is aligned with feminist agendas vis-à-vis writing the often hidden history of women’s agency. Irigaray is a foundational figure in setting out the parameters of such an imperative and her writing in this regard is a principle referent for the cycle as a whole.

Returning to the video fragment discussed above; to the office, to the kitchen and to the computer screen. As time passes in increments across the minute-long pause, the fixed shot itself comes into focus along with its steady record of a framed space in which the off-screen is implied along its edges. This powerfully non-narrative fixed frame brackets a segment of footage that is sensitively specific; in which the contents captured within the frame correlate exclusively with the particularity that is recorded. Such a fixed shot calls to the cinema of Chantal Ackerman, and what critic Ivone Marguiles calls her “images between images”: those scenes edited out of conventional representation. The film Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles, is Ackerman’s most celebrated and powerful deployment of these between spaces. Over the three hours and twenty-one minutes of the film, Ackerman’s camera takes in the expanse of Dielman’s domestic existence in long, fixed takes as she methodically peels potatoes, as she exits the frame to collect something from another room and then returns, as she stands up from the couch and then sits again. Marguiles discusses the “literal time” of Ackerman’s shot as undoing “any idea of symbolic transcendence”, of “robbing [the film] of the possibility of standing for something other than that concrete instance”. Such a tendency to specificity, to the concrete instance, is articulated throughout the Genealogies cycle. It is present in the indexicality that is, of course, implied in the use of index cards and in the patient taxonomy of the archive.
These two trajectories within the *Genealogies*; cycle—the social articulation of space and the tendency toward exquisite specificity—coalesce within Judith Butler’s recent discussion of the political formation of publics. In a lecture presented as a side-programme of the 2011 Venice Biennale, Butler foregrounded the “between-ness” of Hannah Arendt’s formulation of “the space of appearance” as the necessary substrate for political action. Butler notes,

No one body establishes the space of appearance, but this action, this performative exercise happens only “between” bodies, in a space that constitutes the gap between my own body and another’s. In this way, my body does not act alone, when it acts politically. Indeed, the action emerged from the “between”.

Butler goes on to set out a revisionist analysis of Arendt’s theoretical topography, noting the absence of the domestic and the feminine subject from “the space of appearance”, drawing attention to these off-camera images, to their subtraction in a politically significant process of editing. Expanding this analysis, Butler discusses the temporary domestic structures formed during the 2011 occupation of Tahrir Square, including spaces of care and of reproductive labour. An exhaustive inclusivity is necessary, then, in accounting for the space between. Its between-ness must be maintained, held open as it were, with the concrete instants of space; even if they amount to a pause, to a simple making-visible. And so it is in the grainy materiality of the concrete instant, of specificity, that we share the “space between”, a space in which the mythic, symbolic tendencies of signification are countermanded. The between-space has much to do with edges; as the outline of a subject doesn’t so much enclose personal space as open out onto a shared and social space. The edge-play of the *Genealogies*; cycle draws also on the edges of visibility. The formation of politicised publics, outlined by Butler, is one of dilating the “space of appearance” so as to include a feminine, affective realm. That is, of altering the threshold of perceptible relations within a social space; its horizon. In a similar sense, the between-space captured within the conversation between Cruz and Dean permitted a shift in focus, a refocus toward the spatial layering that implicates, in the reception of the viewer, an awareness of her or his own surface. In folding reception through the rhetorics of display, and in a strong tendency towards the particular, Alex Martinis Roe points to a horizon of specificity within the art encounter. She writes “I have a desire to know, acknowledge and engage ethically [an ethics of sexual difference—of specificity] with each visitor”.

On this final matter Jean-Luc Nancy, an ever-helpful theorist of the social, is eloquent; “It is the horizons themselves that must be challenged”.

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1 The term “cycle” is used in preference to “project”. Via Avital Ronell, I draw upon Bataille’s resistance to the notion of a “project” as “it’s always closural, always servile to an agenda”. Avital Ronell, “Meaning”, in *Life Examined*, ed. Astra Taylor (New York: The New Press, 2009), 48.


5 Alex Martinis Roe, correspondence with the author, 7 Mar. 2012.

As one of my interlocutors for Genealogies; Frameworks for Exchange, I asked Carla Cruz to nominate a female author who was influential to her and whom she would like to meet using an online video conferencing programme. I arranged for her to meet Jodi Dean, author of Solidarity of Strangers: Feminism After Identity Politics (1996), and an important book for Cruz’s current research. Cruz recorded their discussion using software that I had sent her. They began their discussion by reflecting on the text called The New Portuguese Letters that had been nominated by Carla Cruz as a third term for their discussion. Written by “The Three Marias”, Maria Isabel Barreno, Maria Teresa Horta and Maria Velho Da Costa, the text is a collective work of protest against the Fascist regime in Portugal that censored their writing on women in contemporary Portugal in the early 1970s and issued warrants for their arrest.

Jodi Dean:
One of the things that I liked about reading the text that you suggested we talk about, was this kind of different way of being with one another that the women had. They were really open, really intimate without being lovers, nor were they related to one another by kin, and they don’t seem to share a workplace—so they don’t end up being either work colleagues in a strong sense, or competitors. So they have this whole different relation to one another that they have built, which is really kind of wonderful. I’ve got to say, that under neo-liberal capital, it is increasingly rare that women have time to make these kinds of relations to one another.

Carla Cruz:
The initial goal of my project All My Independent Women (for which The New Portuguese Letters has been very important) was to raise visibility for the work of female and male artists who work with gender issues. And now I have to question that desire for visibility. How can one desire to be visible in the context that one is trying to question? In a way, the context that All My Independent Women is questioning is one that really lacks solidarity, because it is not one of the things that are valued in the arts—collective practices, and practices like the invisibility of the author, which is already an aspect of this book from the 1970s.

Jodi Dean:
... in the way that they blend together and don’t emphasise a particular voice. It seems really brave to be willing and able to not let an individual voice stand out, but to contribute to a plural voice.
After reflecting on the nature of The Three Marias’ collective authorship, the discussion shifts to protests in Spain and other European countries in early 2011. Cruz and Dean’s discussion occurred exactly three months before the Occupy Wall Street protest began.

Jodi Dean:
What I think is completely exciting about all of these movements and all of these square occupations is that they are trying to bring about something new. Essentially these are steps towards overthrowing what we have. These are steps towards real revolution and the question is going to be: Are left-wing people organised enough to push forward and to go for it and try to overthrow the governments like they’ve done in the Middle East or will they be pushed back or will there be some kind of compromise? It’s early to know, but the exciting thing about all the folks in the squares is like, oh my God people can do it, and it’s tremendous! It goes against what everybody has been saying for the last thirty years, that everyone is totally individualistic, totally consumerist, totally mediated. But actually no, people will go out and talk to each other about things that matter.

Carla Cruz:
It has been really exciting and I wonder if the protests, gatherings and discussions will continue. It is difficult to imagine our lives without the state, or not without the state, but without the voting system as the only way of consulting the people, which has been one of the major problems I guess.

Jodi Dean:
I think that one of the most exciting things that we can do now is actually engage in experiments in reimagining how to reorganise ourselves. I think that’s an incredibly exciting project. I would think that the alternative doesn’t have to be state, no state, but what kind of state. I think things like vaccinations against diseases, clean air, mass transport, a nice health care system are really important, and they require states, but better states: states that are accountable to the poor and working people. If that was the first priority, it would be a state that benefits everyone. So if you think about a state that is accountable to poor and working people, that is run by poor and working people, what would that look like? You can imagine all sorts of constitutional conventions, and different levels of government, local governments, broader coalition area governments and then even larger ones. I think that all those possibilities can be really, really open. Actually, there are some really cool alternatives to voting that people are thinking about. There is a German academic named Hubertus Buchstein who has a book on lotteries, it is a history of the lottery—you know, choosing by lots. So, representatives of the people wouldn’t be voted on, they would just be chosen at random by a lottery system. And then they would work in government for a while and then there would be a new lottery and other people would take a turn.

Carla Cruz:
A couple of years ago I was living in an apartment building in Porto, Portugal, with eight flats, and buildings that are shared in Portugal have to have an administration. That administration rotates among the people who live there. So every second year, there is a new tenant administrating the building, just for basic things like collecting the money to pay the cleaning lady who will
clean the staircase and change the light bulb. And every year there is a meeting, so it’s really interesting because it is like a little state. I was an administrator for two years and when it came to the time to give the responsibility to someone else, it was really strange because one of the women who was living there refused to be the administrator. That was really strange because she was always quite opinionated at the meetings, the one to really complain in every meeting. I remember being very upset: How could she voice so many of her opinions and be so critical of the job that I had done, when she herself didn’t want to do that job. I guess that is a complicated thing in a democracy.

Jodi Dean:
How did you guys resolve that?

Carla Cruz:
Well someone just stepped in. I argued a lot, saying that I had had my own difficulties doing the accounting and difficulties managing my private time and the time that I could give to the common. But she just said that she couldn’t do it, that she was too nervous. And of course, we couldn’t just force it on her and say, “You have to leave the building”. Someone just said that they would take her turn. That is a problem with participation.

Jodi Dean:
I was just asked by some people in our local Democratic Party to run for the city council for our local area, because the local city council representative in our area is moving to a different job, and I declined, but I feel really guilty about it. I declined because I don’t have any time. But I also don’t think of myself as a Democrat. I think of myself as a communist or a socialist and I didn’t know if that would go over so well in the local newspaper. I also didn’t think it would be fair to the local Democratic Party. But I think maybe that’s just an excuse. It’s more like the amount of time it would take right now. But I think that maybe I did the wrong thing, that maybe I made a mistake in not agreeing to run, in not agreeing to serve. I said I’d serve in the future.

Carla Cruz:
The drawing of lots is one of the things that Rancière draws upon. I think in the end, just the possibility that anyone could be responsible is interesting.

Jodi Dean:
That’s the best part of Rancière’s account of democracy: that democracy is kind of crazy or utopian, or whatever his adjective is; the wild idea that anyone could rule. And that’s an exciting idea. I don’t think that kind of democracy is possible outside of an egalitarian economic system. Under capitalism you can’t have that kind of democracy where anyone could rule.

Carla Cruz:
Of course, because people have different positions in society ...
Jodi Dean:
One thing about the text [The New Portuguese Letters] that I found was that the writers seemed to have a sense of freedom in their writing together. They seemed to experience it as a kind of liberation from sexual and social constraints that they felt as women, or as mothers. There is something about the text that felt very much a product from the 1970s. You know, I’m a blogger now ... The writing people do online is ... “commodified” is not quite the right word, and “spectacularised” is not quite the right word, but there’s a becoming mundane; a having become mundane quality of expressive writing, emotional writing, or personal writing on blogs where people want to connect with others. The moment that could make that kind of writing that women were doing in the 1970s possible, it’s almost like it’s been kind of expanded, amplified, and in the process superseded. I don’t know if this is a problem that artists have, but I think it is a problem for personal or expressive writing right now. In that it has become a popular component of networked cultures, who will write expressively and share intimate details about themselves with one another.

Carla Cruz:
Do you think there’s also a different understanding of an audience, of a public?

Jodi Dean:
I don’t really think that we have publics in the same sense anymore. I think public was a term that made sense for a limited amount of time, and maybe not for us now. I think that now we have networks, groups; the Twitter language is “followers”; the Facebook language is “friends”, although it’s hard to call that “friends”.

Carla Cruz:
It’s true, because most of these networks of bloggers or even Twitter, it is always user, consumer and producer. We’re never just spectators, because we’re always also producers of the network that we are using.

Jodi Dean:
And in fact, I like the way you put it, we recognise our own way of producing the spectacle. For example, I saw a recent big movie and mentioned it on Facebook, again being one tiny part of what makes that a spectacle. So I like that you associate what we do as producers with producing the spectacle itself.

Carla Cruz:
I don’t really know how that resonates with my practice, because I thought for a long time that my practice was critical of the spectacle, but in a way there is a lot of potential in actually taking the production of the spectacle into our own hands.

Jodi Dean:
But maybe what you do, I don’t know exactly what you do, but maybe what we shouldn’t do is let the spectacle logic sweep up everything; to the extent that our specific productions could only be understood in terms of a spectacular logic. Recently on my blog I was being critical of new media writing and critical about my own blog. And one of my readers, who has been following my
blog for five or six years said, “I think you’re being too dismissive. Our conversations”—I’ve never met the guy, he’s not an academic, and we’ve never come into contact—“have been more than just consciousness raising. They have affected my practice, my political practice, and they have changed the way I think about myself and what I am”. So I think we shouldn’t let the spectacle logic influence us so much, but recognise that our small moments, our small discussions—if it’s an exhibition, an article, a book, a painting—that the small things actually have affects, that the small things are still not trivial.

Carla Cruz:
Someone was asking me recently why I was such a fan of democracy and I couldn’t really answer. I think I always position myself and my activism toward that project—toward making it work, making democracy work, because I thought it was the best system, with all its faults.

Jodi Dean:
What is it about democracy that is meaningful and important to you? What is it about a democratic ideal that resonates for you?

Carla Cruz:
Not that I arrived at it, but the notion of participation has always been really important for me and I think for many years I thought of them as synonyms, participation and democracy, but now I am more and more critical of participation. To put it in another way, I thought total participation was the problem-solver of everything. If we could include everyone in the discussion, we would have a healthier, stronger democracy. I’m not sure of it anymore. I see more and more the problems and the violence of participation, such as this woman that didn’t want to be the administrator of my apartment building. She didn’t want that, so while I was defending that we really need everyone to participate because that is how the system can work, for her it was just an absolute violence. So in a way, I am still trying to see how we can understand democracy in different ways.

Jodi Dean:
The thing that frustrates me in contemporary appeals to democracy is, I think there is too much emphasis on a process without regard to the outcome. In the US all sorts of right-wing people participate in politics a lot. The finance sector, the big banks spend billions on lobbyists, campaign contributions and political maneuvering. So there is a lot of participation going on there. It strikes me that to emphasise participation is to lose sight of the kind of universal egalitarianism that is actually at the core of the best impulses toward democracy. I would say that the best impulses toward democracy really are impulses toward communism. But over the last thirty years we’ve lost the language of communism, and we have lost the ability for the language of communism to be meaningful for us. To me it’s an important project to remind ourselves of universal egalitarianism as a really substantive political ideal, and one that is worth fighting for, and worth expressing, and worth developing, and worth reinvigorating. Democracy has become a watered-down version that’s way too compliant with new media that tells
us constantly to participate. We can vote on stupid
talent shows and all that kind of stuff, but I think
that what we lose is the substance. The more we
can embrace a communist approach to universal
egalitarianism, the more the things that we’ve
admired and held onto with democracy will come
to the fore.

WORKSHOP
Ian Potter Museum of Art

Frameworks for Exchange Workshop on Genealogies and
Spaces Between Authorships held at the Ian Potter Museum
of Art, the University of Melbourne, on 17 February 2012 by
Alex Martinis Roe assisted by Tim Coster.

Participants: Terri Bird, Jan Bryant, Laura Castagnini,
Anastasia Rose Clendinnen, Georgina Criddle, Fayen d’Evie,
Tamsin Green, Clare Huston, Amita Kirpalani, Laresa
Kosloff, Michelle Mantsio, Kendal McQuire, Sanné Mestrom,
Jonathan Nichols, Hannah Roe, Suzette Wearne, Christine
White.
Dear members of the Milan Women’s Bookstore Collective,

I am a visual artist making artworks that create and document spaces for ethical relations, having been, like you, influenced by Luce Irigaray’s philosophy.

Recently, I have facilitated (and attempted to facilitate) conversations between female cultural producers from different generations. Since many young activists from the 1970s are now established academics and the majority of feminist activists work in academia or the arts, I felt that it would be particularly useful to look at the generational relations between feminist academics and, thus, authors. I was particularly curious to unpack the quality of textual relations between different generations of feminists and how these relations played out on an interpersonal level.

At a conference on Irigaray’s work I set up meetings between keynote speakers and delegates who were not presenting; and then, in a later project, between women who are a part of my network of interlocutors and writers who had been influential to them. Many of these meetings created positive connections between people who had never met. Sadly, however, I found that in many cases where young female academics had been taught by formidable senior feminists, they felt ultimately rejected and were unwilling to make contact again as part of my project. The sensitivity and vulnerability of these intergenerational relations seems to me to reflect the problems Irigaray describes in mother-daughter relationships under patriarchy.

I think it is time there was renewed attention on putting theory into practice, and on seeing our personal relations as political sites. As important textual mothers in this endeavor, I have been very influenced by the way you put Irigaray’s theory of constructing woman-to-woman sociality directly into the practice of affidamento in the late 1970s and early 1980s. As I understand it, affidamento describes a relationship between two women, whereby one entrusts her subjectivity in the public sphere to the other. This entrustment is between two women who have disparate relationships to power, where one has knowledge or abilities that the other desires and their alliance creates a new relation in the social order.

About a year ago I went to Paris to meet with Irigaray to discuss this project of mine. When I mentioned that I had been influenced by your practice of affidamento, I was surprised to hear that there had been minimal interpersonal contact between your collective and Irigaray. Given the particular relevance of the practice to intergenerational relations and female genealogies, I felt that the collective's textual relation to Irigaray, which was so clearly acknowledged
in your texts, must have been a strong one interpersonally too. It piqued my curiosity as to the lived experience of affidamento within your collective.

I feel that it is particularly timely now, while so many colleagues and I are considering the future of feminism and the shape its collectivity may take, that your practical experiences of creating ethical interpersonal and intertextual relations among women and imagining a collective politics of difference are recorded. If sexual difference is to be a part of our culture, not as a lesser or invisible component, but as an equivalent place from which to speak, then there needs to be a usable history—a language of feminism and femininity. I would like to meet your current and former members to talk about affidamento in practice, with a view to facilitating conversations between women who had, or still have this relation to one another. I would like to record these conversations under conditions negotiated with the participants in the research and then exhibit these documents as an art installation and also transcribe parts of them to be compiled into a book. I would also hope that you would consider publishing and stocking it in your bookstore on via Pietro Calvi in Milan.

I hope very much to hear from you soon.
With my very best regards,

Alex Martinis Roe

Alex Martinis Roe, Diagram of Entrustment, red and black ink on reverse side of an A4 photocopy, 2010.
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