

RELATIONAL AND DIALOGICAL: AN AUSTRALIAN CONTEXT

There are numerous artists presenting performance or event-based practices in Australia who can be interpreted in terms of relational aesthetics or the dialogical, where conversation and interaction are the primary focus. However, as indicated in my discussion of Domenico de Clario in chapter three, it is clear that a relational aesthetic can be seen in works that were made before Bourriaud announced what he considers to be a new approach to art-making in the 1990s. I suggested that de Clario can be seen as a precursor to relational aesthetics but we can also add other artists such as Anne Graham and Lyndal Jones. Jones has been producing performance art since the late 1970s and these have become increasingly participatory and multi-disciplinary. Graham and Jones engaged with feminist and Marxist critiques of the artist's role in society and the ways in which gender, class and race restricted peoples' choices. Graham and Jones are acutely aware of how art needs to address its means of production and distribution and both, in different ways, have expanded their audiences beyond the parameters of the art world. Jones does so by speaking across the visual arts, performance and screen cultures with multiple collaborations. Graham contributes by working in an imbedded way on the streets, in the art world and in communities where she creates participatory environments.

Thai artist, Rirkrit Tiravanija, is highly acclaimed in the relational aesthetics school. His signature works are kitchens and cafes in galleries, art spaces and museums that provide simple meals for guests to share. These events create situations of dialogical exchange where people have a convivial meal together and talk, creating what Bourriaud calls micro communities. However these are invariably art world people talking together. Anne Graham has been creating mobile kitchens since 1992. Her food is often made for street people and the homeless who shelter in available public spaces in cities. The first of these projects was the interactive *Installation for Walla Mulla Park* (1992) where the artist set up a series of modular tent-like structures under a railway bridge.¹⁰² An evening meal was served outside each night and films were projected on the wall opposite the tent. Sue Best notes that the space welcomed everyone and allowed "all kinds of contradictory spaces to collide: public and private, dangerous and safe, active performance space and passive receptive viewing space, high culture and extreme poverty, the everyday and the exotic".¹⁰³ She also suggests that this environment and others conceived by Graham are a reclaiming of feminised space, places where people gather to be nurtured.¹⁰⁴ *The Hide*, Hopetoun Bridge, Maribyrnong River (1998) was a similar project which provided a retreat for people including safe shelter, meals and a screening area.¹⁰⁵

Anne Graham has also done a series of work about the plight of lowly paid workers under capitalism by taking on the same kind of work and making it in public. She sews garments on trains and in the street for hour upon hour, quietly producing cheap garments for sale in chain stores (*SWEAT*, 1994). Her work *The Silk Plaza* at the Echigo-Tsumari Triennial in 2000 saw her



above: Anne Graham, *Walla Mulla Park, Working in Public*, a public project initiated by Artspace Sydney, 1992. Photograph: Tim Marshall; below: Anne Graham, *The Hide, Construction and Process*, Hopetoun Bridge, Melbourne, 1998. Photograph: Anthony Bond





engage with women from the Tokamachi prefecture, an economically depressed region in Japan. Here Graham set up a kitchen so that the women who collected wild vegetables to cook their traditional recipes could serve dinner to each other and to their visitors. Everyone was encouraged to exchange stories about local food and thus set up a cultural memory of place. In this context and to encourage more participation, Graham hired musicians to play each night. She notes that “we made the place come alive with histories of meals taken. We also invented new recipes and creatively documented food”.¹⁰⁶ The project is ongoing. In 2007 Graham relocated her activities into the gallery space. Titled *In Between Space* (Artspace, Sydney) it created rooms that housed specific activities: some active, some passive. People could wash their hands, have their hair cut, watch projections, experience a balloon room, and, of course, get fed in the kitchen.