

Public Memory / Private Memory : Sifting Through the Invisible  
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I want to preface this talk by telling you that this is a story in three parts....The visual is a way in which to locate myself as I try to define my cultural identity...It's an endurance of sorts. If you were to see this in a gallery setting, you'd have the option of not having to deal with it all, I suppose, to come and go as you please, but here, in this context, I have literally a captive audience, and so I apologize....

It's pretty new; no one has really seen it yet.

The other two stories are events that occurred in my life this past week. They're quite potent and poignant, one being very personal and the other a bit more political. And though disconnected geographically, I feel represents this on-going struggle and relationship that we continue to perpetuate through hate and war.

*(show video) – 12 minutes*

I know that I was supposed to be talking about ideas around memory and the archive and fact and fiction and showing you past work and current work and future work... but I chose instead to show you *Bury Me At Sea* (in five shades of blue) -- a short piece that I made only a couple of weeks ago. I shot it last summer off the New England coast in experiments with catamarans going out at dusk while trying to find some claim to night waters.

This fascination that I have for the sea is about positioning myself in a place that belongs to no one yet belongs to everyone. How can you divide water? It's a place that I continue to return perhaps because when I finally arrive I feel closer to that existential space that wanders between worlds and cultures.

My work is not so much about what is *not* happening, but what *is* happening. It's what lies underneath the surface of things. Much like the photograph. Much like an archive. In witnessing archives from the genocide this past year, my prevailing questions are somewhat predictable. What lies underneath the surface of cruelty? And what lies underneath our desire and the need to rescue? These questions continually filter through and find their way into my work.

But of late, I've been plagued by the idea of how to transcend an artwork. The interconnectivity between and the process of art and life or what Allan Kaprow calls 'lifelike art' is one that bears more power on my visual sensibility these days as an artist than the fruit of the product. Kaprow states, "...ordinary life performed as art/not art can charge the everyday with metaphoric power."

I spent the last few days with a dying friend. She's Turkish, this friend, someone who has been in my life for nearly 30 years...though it's been her sister, Peri, that I've been close to all of this time. My dying friend, Lisa was always on the periphery—she and I communicating over the years by telephone in spotty conversations, most usually over the well being of her sister. Lisa

was diagnosed with lung cancer about 8 and a half years ago.... She told me that *'it was 2 days after 9-11 that I was diagnosed and that it was as though the pain of the world ripped through me like a knife'*. Aside from our long friendship that was more empty gaps of time than time spent, there was a strange and peculiar pull towards a distant friend -- something so deeply familiar that it crystallized into some kind of recognition moving beyond language.

I remember once, I can't remember the context, perhaps it was a gesture or a comment I made, when Peri, happily remarked, 'oh, you're such a Turk' and I wasn't quite sure what this meant to her. I remember thinking at the time that this was indeed how she saw me as I remember saying, 'no I'm not. I'm an Armenian' she brushed that off ... she didn't hear it. To Peri, I was a Turk. I remember feeling a little bit angry. I wasn't insulted or maybe I was, but it was something more like feeling discounted. Off balance. Invisible. Erased. This moment has haunted me for years. Not so much that Peri had included me into a world (or should I say 'word') that didn't belong to me, but what seemed to be my irrational reaction to her comment. Especially in light of my history, as a human being, in this body, on this planet.

My only reality is one of being an American. I have no history pre-mother and father. Grandparents on both sides were all dead when I was born. Armenians on one side; Germans on the other. The archives are lost or belong to distant cousins that I don't know and never met. My only record is a few photographs and a few mythic stories. I see my cultural identity as a bedtime story that's never been told to me. It lives in fragmented abstraction.

It's surreal when you watch pain and suffering in someone close to you. The initial shock I had of seeing her standing at the foot of the tub, dropping her robe to the floor, her emaciated body, reminiscent of any photograph in any archive surrounding any genocide. She transformed *into* my history. She and I WERE the archive. A kind of living / breathing archive.

As I bathed her and groomed her and held her and witnessed the energy of that love, I realized in those moments that this is the healing that needs to occur. How ironic that I was holding and loving and caring for the withering body of my dear Turkish friend.

The complexity of the design was brilliant. This is the space where life and art collide, where transcendence takes place, where forgiveness might begin.

Before I close, I want to take you to another part of the world that I find in many ways relevant to all of this. I want to share an email that I received last Friday from a graduate student that I advise and who lives in Lahore, Pakistan.

Hi Jean Marie,

Yes, my life tends towards complexity, life is like that here or maybe it's just me, these times?

Making art is only part of that, but then its all part of the same buzz that surrounds this

Speck of life, that's me. I don't know if its *real* to pare things down, I don't know if its do-able to do all of this either.

I'm a gardener. Some things take, live and thrive and some die, soon or later. I make gardens like that, with a light hand that tries to work alongside nature. Like nature, looking as much like nature as possible in a given space. My understanding of what that means keeps growing, year by year.

What should be deemed successful? And on who's terms?

I planted hundreds of trees today on a huge site *Kanack Champa's* (pterosperrum acerifolium) mostly. I taught a professional practice class to final years this morning. I traveled from the city to the countryside and back, an early start. Two days in a row now, its tiring, a very difficult drive. I prepared documents for the SVA, B.O.S. on Monday and lots of administrative stuff at work. I have much more to do tonight.

Meanwhile around lunchtime today, only 500 yds from our home (we live opposite R.A. bazaar), two powerful bombs were detonated. One I believe a suicide attack on a pick-up full of patrolling soldiers who all died. The second nearby blew up the local Pan shop, mobile-phone booths and our local vegetable market. I don't know how many died, media say 40-50. Eye witnesses here say 70-80, mostly the old, women and children. Someone working in my house went to help out immediately, the second blast was 100ft from where he was standing, a knee joint landed in front of him whilst people on each side were blown down. He came back sickened and proceeded to make the most uneven brickwork I've seen in a while.

The injured and dying were laid out on our front lawn for a while before people came for them.

Tonight the market was washed clean, though body parts and clothing persist in the overhead cables. Huma and I went for a walk in the local park, just up the road from R.A. Bazaar this evening.

Our cleaner said the french windows almost jumped out of their tracks, they are 5mm and toughened glass, lucky I think. No Papayas fell from the trees surprisingly.

I have a few hideous photos of body parts draped over a cell phone advert, nerve fibres, skin and veins? and general carnage shots. I'll send you one though I think its meaningless? hard to say.

I sent Jamil off with my camera as dusk fell. Its not good for me to be seen taking such things, Blackwater paranoia everywhere. The army stopped him and made him delete many of the photos and those I took earlier today driving through check-posts on the Mall.

He was lucky they didn't take him in.

Everyone at home looks sick and tense.

Just now another terrible blast at *Moon Market*, where a few months ago a ghastly blast killed scores of people.

Sounds like things are back in full swing after a short winter lull.

Friends from all over the world have been calling us all day, in fact that's how I found out.

I still haven't seen the news. (I will before I send you this.) I just did 5 bombs tonight in Iqbal Town, 32 injured here, 8 soldiers dead maybe 40 civilians dead.

Huma and I are having a couple of drinks, there's music playing, its all very normal for us at least.

- good travels,

David

After reading his email, the image that I've been carrying around with me is of David planting hundreds of trees the day of the bombing. Here too, yet another collision between life and art and the power of metaphor in the everyday.