AA Gallery, Front Members' Room, Bedford Square, 26 April – 25 May 2013
Architectural Association
36 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3ES
Monday to Friday 10am–7pm
Saturday 10am–3pm
Rethinking Intervention
Cultural Hijack presents a survey of provocative interventions which have inserted themselves into the world, demanding attention, interrupting everyday life, hijacking, trespassing, agitating and teasing. Often unannounced and usually anonymous, these works have appeared on billboards, secretly hacked into TV and radio broadcasts, detoured billboards, re-appropriated street furniture, subverted signs, monuments and civic architectures.

The exhibition sets out to explore the role of art and the artist in contemporary society and to offer the opportunity to rethink the growing use of interventionist art practices, particularly in relation to the field of cultural interventions. The exhibition itself is in itself the intersection of art, politics and social justice in a historical moment, as we witness a rising tide of global resistance to neoliberal capitalism through an expanding ‘movement of movements’, from Zapatismo to the Arab Spring to the Occupy Wall Street. In the shadows of this moment, artists are joining in with the writing of alternative histories, the reclamation of our rights to the city and the unfinished project of the revolution of everyday life.

In attempting to house these ideas together within an institution, we are mindful of the Architectural Association as an influential zone, where the physical fusion of those disciplines is significantly shaped. We propose that the dissemination of the ideas and practices gathered for Cultural Hijack might similarly shape the possibilities for us to occupy as yet unimagined futures where user-generated cities and systems can support individual and collective empowerment, become more prevalent.

Cultural Hijack traverses our shared landscape – the spatial, social and psychological territories of our everyday. Tastes and architectures, documentation in the AA galleries, as a programme of live interventions throughout inner-city London, and in its ‘TRA’ publication, a collection of questions raised will be pulled apart. An active archive will be in operation in the exhibition – updated daily to reflect the unfolding nature of the work to the documentation of such work.

EPOS 257 (Czech) take many artists in the exhibition by the word, and in some cases, give them a pseudonym. He sits at a table making oversized polyurethane paint-filled bullets to be fired from a giant shootable billboard, complete with billboards and antagonistic architectures in a gesture of reverse take-over. In response to a regime’s first direct presidential elections, EPOS cut out the heads of candidates from giant billboards and reinserted these ragged paper cutouts into leaflets in public spaces. Exhibition / Live

Street artist Zevs (France), renowned for his reappropriation of the invisible, takes the silhouettes of Mohammed Atta and Abdul-Aziz Al-Omari in the room they stayed in the night before the 9/11 attacks. Visual Kidnapping surgically removes a giant 40ft woman from a Lavazza billboard in the night before the 9/11 attacks. Exhibition

The interventions of Matthias Wernke & Mischa Leinkauf, exploring urban environments, are translated into playful and poetic films of trespass and civil disobedience. In Between documentary filmmakers Michael Rakowitz (USA) explores the political discourses and public perceptions underpinning the West’s relationship to Iraq. In Spools (2011) he took over a haughty Manhattan restaurant to serve up traditional Iraqi dishes on rare pieces of fine China imported from the Kuwait National Collection. In a dramatic conclusion, a cease-and-desist order by New York City authorities resulted in the repatriation of the dishes, performance and Iraq. In his ongoing project paraSITE, Rakowitz also works with homeless people to create custom built inflatable shelters that can be attached to ventilation ports.

Cyber activists and artists Electronic Disturbance Theater (USA) are known for their electronic actions in support of the Zapatista movement. Applying the tactics of trespass and blockade, they adopt a form of electronic terrorism that creates virtual sit-ins to attack websites, including the Pentagon and the Mexican Stock Exchange. In Trans-world Standoff they hack cheap GPS mobile phones to install a device for helping Mexican immigrants navigate the US-Mexico border. Exhibition / Live

The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA) UK and worldwide offer the surreal sight of a highly disciplined army of professional clowns acting against the grain of everyday life and other issues. In a carnival protest against the invasion of Iraq, CIRCA formed a welcome committee for ‘arch-clown’ Peter McCaughey from the UK. Exhibition / CONTRAvention

Alan Dunn (UK) intervenes in his own daily commute to offer free art to the people with whom he shares buses, station platforms and streets. Dunn’s 'Loophole for All' project works with soldiers who fought during recent armed conflicts and are returning to civilian life. The War Veteran Vehicle transforms the mechanical stenonomies of veterans into a mobile sound and projection vehicle as words are fired onto the desired surfaces of public buildings and monuments. Exhibition / Live / CONTRAvention

Quebec collective BGL (Canada) are known for their playful reflections on consumer culture, nature and human behaviour and have been described as urban pranksters. Their interventions provoke significant encounters with consumer culture that cannot somehow be explained. Subterfuge, trickery and chance create situations that lie between reality and fiction, provoking cognitive dissonance and answers to reality through self-reflection. Exhibition / Live / CONTRAvention

Paul Harfleet (UK) continues his ongoing project wherein he locates sites of historical and social meaning, and in a gesture of quiet resistance, takes soil from the nearest source and plants a single unmarked pancy. Exhibition / Live

Upper Space (UK) is an organisation of professional artists and community organisers, engages issues of social, economic and environmental justice. Their arm of unsanctioned street performances enjoy the freedom of public space as a contested site of democracy. You can find them playing outside the AA, around the edges of appropriate sites of citizenship.

As a rule, Laura Keeble (UK) inserts her work in the streets and public spaces in the early hours of the morning while the workaday city is still asleep. Nearly all of Keeble’s interventions are unsanctioned, appearing overnight by necessity. Exhibition / Live

London-based street artist and sub-vertisseur Dr D (UK) joins forces with situationist filmmaker and journalist Leah Bentzonen (UK) in spontaneous street interventions designed to shock the viewer into questioning the injustices of public sector cuts across Britain and in a gesture of quiet resistance, takes soil from the nearest source and plants a single unmarked pancy. Exhibition / Live / CONTRAvention

Knit the City’s (UK) Yarn Corps are a band of sneaky, stitching graffiti-‘knit-and-crochet’ artists with an ongoing mission to guerrilla knit the city of London, and beyond. They suggest their interventions encourage others to bring their own city to life in ways only they can possibly imagine. Live

Tatsu Nishi (Japan) creates out-of-scale and out-of-place in encounters with urban world, transforming street lights, parked cars and monuments. Stationed in front of the AA, Ascending and Descending coastal Rouge Trottres UK is a gesture of reverse take-over. In a double-edged gesture where the black balacava conceals and reveals, transforming and awakening monumets as live participants. Exhibition / Live / CONTRAvention

Zuspan (UK) makes instant unsanctioned public sculpture in the back alleys and forgotten spaces of cities across the world. Fusing the signpost tradition of Allan Kaprow’s invitation to reclaim the art of everyday life, the Society encourages the transformation of the urban environment through acts of creativity. Before his death, Kaprow relinquished sole authorship of his scores, so that his initial versions were transformed into multiple works, but ideas to be reinvented.

Loophole for All by Paolo Cirio exhibits the arts of corporate identity theft by offering an audience the privileges of corporate consumption. By purchasing and hijacking of various company identities, Cirio uses interventions with major experts to expose the mechanics of institutional crime and alert us to the economic injustice of siphoning capital as a form of institutionalised crime. Exhibition / Live / CONTRAvention

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