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# Political Interventions and Relational Aesthetics

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## Relational, Dialogical, Participatory

Lyndal Jones has an established practice as a performance artist who has consistently utilised projections and video. Although these works often involved collaborators, more recently she has been producing participatory events.

*The Avoca Project* (2005-2015) in rural Victoria is planned as a ten-year site-specific project on art, place and climate change. It brings together artists, scientists, activists and the local community. Events are situated in and around Watford House, which was imported from Germany in 1850. Jones says the house itself is an immigrant, 'its walls revealing stories of wealth and a European glamour now faded by the harshness of the climate and the decreasing services that are the result of globalisation and climate extremes in rural Australia'.<sup>39</sup> The house becomes a site for artworks which are generated by visiting artists and include the local community. The installations, events and symposia are concerned with water and power usage, and resilience to climate change in a small rural town. The house is both a performative and a pedagogical site and it is slowly becoming an example of self-sufficiency due to the engagement of teams of volunteers and tradespeople.

*Rehearsing Catastrophe: The Ark in Avoca* (10 December, 2010) is one of the biggest collaborative events to be coordinated by Jones and a team of volunteers and contributing artists. On a dark night the house was turned into a projection screen inside and out and sounds of inclement weather and animal noises were amplified. From the outside, the house looked like a huge boat. One hundred and forty local residents participated, lining up in groups and pairs to enter *The Ark* via a gangplank. A mistress of ceremonies called for types of animals and the residents filed in with a spectacular array of costumes made by Friends of Avoca.

Two years later Jones reconfigured the event as *Rehearsing Catastrophe: The Ark in Sydney* at the 18th Biennale of Sydney (2012). This *Ark* was on Cockatoo Island, a derelict industrial site complete with old warehouse buildings and machine rooms all crowded together. It is a tough site in which to present art. Jones constructed the bow of *The Ark* so that it protruded out of one of the warehouses. There was no access to the boat. Instead there was a small office with documentation and a series of rehearsals that people were encouraged to attend. They were all preparing for their escape should a catastrophe happen. A notice told people when the rehearsals would take place each day and at the designated time visitors would attend dressed in black coats with animal masks.

In the Avoca version, people entered *The Ark*, but in Sydney people just waited patiently and nothing happened. This aspect of the work compelled Jones. For her it showed how people engage with an idea, in this case the salvation of a people in the face of the devastation of the planet. She said it was often the same people who came, people she did not know and people who just heard about the idea.<sup>40</sup> Documenting *The Ark* people in Sydney was a hit-and-miss affair. People sent images they took themselves and Jones took photographs when she could. There is a sense of united humanity in this project, one that took on a life of its own as people made their costumes and came to stand in line, knowing they would not get onto *The Ark* but also knowing that they were there to represent the possibility of saving humanity from destruction (at least symbolically). The project demonstrates how a propositional artwork can generate a desire that performs itself.