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Our sense of property is epidermal. Embedded into this skin is a complex network of nerves that is readily alarmed at violation, invasion, and threats of any kind. Ideally, of course, all things should be held in common, with ownership a banished, irrelevant concept. But utopias are hard to come by, and survival is more immediate than idealism. We remain, in the west, defined by property, the ultimate commodity.

If any of us looked out one morning to see our neighbor and a surveying crew drawing imaginary lines three feet into our vegetable garden we would probably not sit back and idly sip coffee. When the surface of the epidermis is scratched, we respond instinctively; we bare our teeth at the aggressor and make the most guttural and threatening noises we can. We may reserve our most threatening noises we can. We may reserve our most threatening noises for landlords and developers, but even our neighbours know when to keep their distance.

This analogy breaks down, of course, when we consider those occasions when the skin is definitely not threatened, when contact is pleasurable, celebratory, welcomed, and desired. There are times when the defences come down and when something other than territorial consciousness is communicated. The same is true, although rarely experienced in this cold climate of materialist commodity fetishism, about the skin that separates private and public spaces. Vancouver artist Deborah Koenker and architect Roberto Pacheco's *The Cherry Tree Project* is about the need to remember and explore the possibility inherent in these moments, to consider alternatives that are radical by virtue of their respect for the fragility of consensus. Neither architecture nor art, neither public nor private, *The Cherry Tree Project* is a reminder of our potential for change and reconciliation and a gentle prodding of our resistance to such change.

The work itself was a simple wooden walk-way allowing visitors to casually climb over the psychic border of the backyard fence into two other yards of a typical residential block in Vancouver. Koenker and Pacheco, former residents of Vancouver, recently returned to the city after a prolonged stay in Los Angeles. In making sense of the city again, and their roles within it, *The Cherry Tree Project* had both a personal and political aspect. They opened much more than their backyard to the Vancouver art audience. The occasion for this sharing was the annual blossoming of a huge cherry tree shared by several adjacent yards, and the duration of the work tied to the number of days the tree blossomed. Three sets of stairs allowed access to a common walkway, from three separate yards. The walkway itself guided one into the bower of blossoms, which, on a sunny

spring day, requires little other inducement. The veranda-like construction was deceptively unassuming and immediate.

The first set of references that come to mind are post-minimal experiments with environmental art. Mary Miss, Robert Smithson, Alice Aycock, and George Trakas, have all built structures that address our behavioural response to both built and unbuilt environments. Their work, however, retains a declarative signature quality; it distinguishes itself as 'art' even in the middle of the desert. Koenker and Pacheco have eschewed the self-consciousness of art and tied the work to its conditions in a simplicity that is its strength.

The strategy of tying the project to an event which had unequivocal common appeal has a point to it which should be stressed. Without calling primary attention to itself as art, *The Cherry Tree Project* was willing to share its significance with the tree itself, and to solicit neighbourhood consensus.

Most shared backyard areas are DMZs and the causes of border disputes are as many as they are trivial: dandelion seed balls, slug infestations, crab grass, itinerant and noisy dogs, abandoned vehicles, unattended compost heaps, overdue paint jobs, and property markers. We protect our differences in the name of individuality. The experience of stepping over these borders and knowing that for a few weeks the defences had been dropped was an important part of the piece. Rather than trespassing, we were centred in a moment of commonality to which the state had no access. We were declaring the terms and in control of the context in a virtually subversive manner.

Each neighbor was a collaborator in the project. Any one of them could easily have called City Hall and brought the weight of civic bylaws down on the project, forcing the artists to abandon it. The premise of the work, then, was its common ground, its communal and participatory aspects that were enhanced by the technical illegality of the project: the state has no business in the backyards of the nation. Rather than make art which attempts to reach commonality through interpretation, *The Cherry Tree Project* succeeded through a strategy of simplicity and directness.