

INTRODUCTION

THE TRAFFIC AND THE RUINS OF ART

On a short flight from Melbourne to Sydney I had an interesting conversation with a fellow passenger. We introduced ourselves and enquired about each other's profession. When he informed me that he was an aeronautical engineer, I could not resist asking him to explain to me how a plane gets off the ground. In simple terms he revealed that the crucial difference between a car and a plane is the wing. On a plane the two sides of a wing are unequal. Air particles that collide with the tip of a wing are forced to separate. They travel in parallel along the opposite sides of the wing and reunite at the other end. For the air particles to meet two things must happen. First one particle must travel faster than the other, and secondly, this acceleration will cause a drop in the pressure that separates the two particles. The displacement and subsequent conjunction of the air particles generated by both the curvature of the wing and the motion of the plane results in a difference in air pressure. This allows the plane to lift as it accelerates. He concluded his lesson with a further question.

Do you believe in God?

Ask me again, just before my death, I replied.

He then reminded me that physics and religion are not as far apart as many believe. Einstein, he pointed out, spent much of his time cogitating on the possible role of divine intervention as a

possible explanation of the origin of the universe. I also threw in Stephen Hawking's quip, that he could explain any phenomenon with mathematical precision, if he was permitted the liberty of adding God into the equation. At this stage I was starting to wonder whether it was by a prayer or a wing that a plane actually flies.

It was now my turn to explain my profession. Hearing about my critical engagement with contemporary art my fellow passenger asked:

What do you do when you see an exhibition that you don't like?

Nothing, I replied.

Do you only write about things that you like? He continued.

No. The critical task is not to simply to report or justify my preferences, but to find a way to communicate the meanings that arise in the encounter with the work. Meaning, I added, can be defined by focusing on two directions. First, by connecting a work to its own context within art history, one appreciates the material presence of the work and establishes the degree of aesthetic innovation. Second, meaning can also be found in relating a work to its social context—in this way the political relevance and cultural references can be identified in order to see how it participates in the broader field of power and knowledge. When a critic combines these dual trajectories of thought it also creates a displacement effect in the voice of the critic. The combination between formal appreciation and social engagement elevates writing from the reporting of preferences.

I then began to wonder whether writing on art and politics is a form of oscillation that can be compared to flying. Art and politics are like two particles of air that are forcefully separated when they confront the edge of a wing. Although one particle will travel further than the other, thus creating a difference in air pressure, they will both join again at the other edge of the wing. The difference of the journey between the two particles is what makes flight possible. Similarly, the critic's attention will be reduced to dogma,

if he or she does not allow for the difference in the journey of art and politics. Dogma is the separation of spirit from matter, understanding is found in their tremulous unity.

The metaphor of flight has dominated our cultural landscape in the age of globalization. There are many stories that need to be told about the cultural and political experiences of globalization. They can be told from the perspective of those who stay at home and never dream of leaving. Then there are the many flights and crashes that dominate the metropolitan fascination. Flights say something about our desire to defy gravity, to escape the boundaries of one place and be connected to another. Crashes reveal the pain of going beyond our means or relying on faulty instruments. In this world we all live in various states of turbulence. Even those who have never left home are affected by mobility. The movement of migrants, tourists and refugees cause ripples of influence that touch everyone. The circulation of messages and images is rapidly changing the experience of everyday life. Contemporary art practices are increasingly defined by the dual desire for mobility and attachment to place.

This book offers an account of some of the journeys and transformations that are occurring in specific places and in the more general space of contemporary culture. It focuses on new forms of engagement with place, politics and the everyday in contemporary art. Artists have always had a strong interest in representing the experience of being in a specific place and responding to current political issues. It is my observation that the nature of this engagement has changed in the context of globalization. The idea of representing a local place or reacting to political issues can no longer occur in isolation from global concerns. The myth of the autonomy and the exemption of the artist from everyday life has also exploded. Artists are increasingly working with small communities, and exploring the complex histories of visual traditions that are formed in these places. However, while they are often very protective and committed to these places they are also deeply

aware of their links to global debates and part of transnational dialogues on the meaning of their practice and its relevance to others. In this process the old hierarchies that elevated the place of the artist to be situated either above or beyond the everyday have fallen away. Artists now place themselves in the midst of the traffic of everyday life. They can no longer afford to isolate themselves or presume that they are ahead of the changes that are occurring in the world. Their art is formed in the process of working with others and within the institutions of everyday life.

Recently I was part of a panel discussion on the relationship between art and politics. One of the speakers tried carefully to distinguish between the use of art as propaganda and the denial of political responsibility by artists. She declared: 'I don't know at what point my art becomes political, but I know that it is impossible to pretend that you know nothing of injustice and violence once you have seen it.' I added to her comments by saying that it is both an illusion and a constraint to think that the politics of art exists only in the work. It exists not only in the content of the work but also in the way it joins up with the experience and ideas of other people. The form of these relationships is diverse. In more general terms the form of art is always saturated with political meaning because it has implications that precede and go beyond the artist's individual intentions. In this book I am specifically concerned with art that engages its spatial and social environment. This form of spatial and social practice invariably transposes political values. It is part of my task to clarify the looping relations and mutual feedback that are at play in this system.

The avant-garde favoured the shock tactics of provocation and exposure. Today there are more conciliatory and affirmative strategies. As relations are forged between people and across places, art becomes political. The process of framing the meaning and building the bridges for linking art with the everyday is no longer a task that can be delegated to curators. The production of art now includes an awareness of the way in which it can communicate

with others. The emergence of what I call ‘spatial aesthetics’—and the complex entanglements between local and global ideas of place—have presented artists and writers with new political horizons.

The characteristics of spatial aesthetics are drawn from the history of site-specific practices but then extended by combining the uses of the new communicative networks with the expanded role of the televisual in contemporary society. These three reference points are addressed in critical ways. The utopian drive that underpinned artistic spatial interventions, the abstraction of human communication and the ubiquity of screen images cannot be passed over in silence. They require vigorous and critical applications. After the ruins of the industrial age no artistic project could salvage the city. When Nokia promotes its products with the promise of ‘connecting people’, and Kodak offers to return the ‘reality’ of photography with a digital home printer, then the place of artistic interventions for redeeming sociality and authenticity is almost banished. This rhetoric now pervades global society and it also raises the bar for critical and radical artistic practice. More than ever artists are seeking to question and reinvent the models of connecting people and developing authentic images. This does not mean that art has been subsumed under a new social and spatial function. No, that would be an absurd ambition and a pointless abdication. It is important to stress that as art addresses its place in the world, it is simultaneously redefining both its social project and its aesthetic framework.

This book is structured around the themes of the everyday, cultural identity and place. As the essays progress there is a cumulative logic that weaves the links between these three themes. The first section focuses on the use of everyday material by the young British artists in the 1990s and the theoretical debates on the politics of art. Although it maps the tendency to depoliticize and un-theorize artistic practice, my aim is not to smother art in even heavier theoretical and political discourse. There is another option.

Picking through the history of critical thought and finding signs of hope in the contradictory images of the present provides a writer with the opportunity to explore both the resonance of the past in submerged traditions of thought and explore the connections to the contemporary forms of cultural intervention.

The place and politics of art in everyday life has also presented new challenges for the ways in which we understand cultural identity. The second section examines the ways contemporary artists represent cultural identity. The representation of both culture and identity are not only related to each other but are part of broader ruptures and flows of globalization. The boundaries of an authentic cultural identity are no longer framed according to neat and exclusive territorial coordinates. Nor can we assume that cultural identities are locked in rigid time-frames. Cultural identities are also formed by the ambivalent desires for mobility and attachment and shaped by the contradictory forces of local traditions and global culture. Artists have responded to these transformations by displaying kinds of self-images that are neither totally fictive nor a version of the person that is represented on their passports. The gap between the biography and the fictive self that is presented in art is a space that is used to question the distance between the place from which the artist originates and the other places in which he or she now belongs. Culture and identity are increasingly constructed in hybrid ways. These images often draw from but do not reproduce the totality of a local vernacular.

The place of art in a global world is the overriding theme of the third section. It defends the dual ambition of contemporary artists who maintain the right to an active presence in a local context and participate in transnational dialogues. Everyone who enters the context of contemporary art is already part of the complex process of intervention and feedback that now cuts across the world. This duality is neither experienced as an irreconcilable opposition nor as a loss of authenticity. However, the key task is not to simply parade more signs of difference but to introduce different ways of

being in the world. The Cuban curator and critic Gerardo Mosquera stressed that expansion in the recruitment of artists from diverse countries is not the solution to the problems of exclusion and appropriation. The conundrum of choice in globalization is evident in the plethora of non-establishment collaborative projects and the spread of biennales to every corner of the globe. This new form of pluralism in contemporary art is, in Mosquera's words, 'a prison without walls'. He reminds us that the best labyrinth in the world is the desert. In its vast openness there is no escape. The city is also a desert. For most of the twentieth century artists found refuge amongst its forgotten spaces. In amongst the ruins of the post-industrial landscape I also search for clues of the way out of these impasses.

The general aim of this book is not only to map out the interventions that artists have made in specific places, or to account for the political consequences of their gestures, but to see how the interconnection of these actions is part of an ongoing attempt to grasp the emerging senses of identity and the complex forms of relations with others that occur in everyday life. The double perspective of this book, part theoretical and part discursive, reflects my own levels of engagement with art and politics. It is an attempt to reflect on broad trajectories and imaginatively construct the sense of the world that is forged when art is placed in specific environments.

The essays in this collection focus on the significance that artists have given to the fragments within stories, spatial meanings that arise from the holes in cities, the struggles of living that are marked in the lines on a face, the cultural value of feasts, the memories that cover over the gaps in names, the function of lists on a wall, flags in the landscape, or the improbable stories of icons walking across the seas. Within these small gestures it is possible to discern strange echoes composed of different voices and the persistence of memories that are otherwise overwhelmed by the din of progress. Attention to these detailed representations of everyday life, or the

micro-narratives of contemporary cultures, are not based on a need to retreat from the broader issues of social change, but driven by a belief that the dynamic between global and local interchanges is made more palpable through the scrutiny of lived experiences.

The art of placing and the place for art is always shifting. Artists stretch the boundaries of their practice by defining their context and strategies in paradoxes. Museums without walls. Cities as laboratories. Living archives. Walking narratives. These slogans are now common in the artworld. They reveal a recurring desire: to stretch the parameters of art by incorporating new technologies, sites and perspectives. As they introduce foreign tools, places and subjects they also expand the category of the contemporary. Today the shock of the new is not very shocking, it is just a starting point for thinking about reality. For over a century artists and writers have realized that art and life do not exist in separate domains. The idea that the place of art is above life is an illusion that no longer has much meaning.

There is now a wide variety of ways in which artists engage with everyday life. This produces new challenges for the way writers and curators need to work with artists. It is possible to imagine art and the everyday as two legs joined to the body of living but not necessarily striding in the same rhythm. The new practices of art do not always aim to result as objects that can be collected and displayed in museums. The ultimate aim may well be the initiation of experiences that occurs in an everyday setting. However, even these site-specific experiences are not immune from the process of institutionalization. When art from the everyday returns to the museum, it is not simply a matter of balancing documentation with display. Simulacra of these events can be as moving as the proverbial dream about the most exotic bird in a cage with the door slightly ajar. You awaken from a dream but what happened? The bird has gone. Coming back to the museum must be for the artist like coming back to a demanding home, one that insists on new engagements between place (*topos*) and modes of perception

(*tropos*). This level of engagement with everyday life and the ambivalent relationship that it poses with the institutions of art also present new challenges to writers. There is a need for the writer to be there to experience the event and also be aware of the politics of institutionalization. The writer does not merely trace out the remains of the artist's dream. The written document cannot replace the feather; it must suggest another form of flight.

There is a form of writing called topography that is conventionally understood as referring to either a system for mapping a landscape, or the contours and form of a place. I would like to extend this concept for rethinking the relationship between art and place. Art can never totally represent a specific place. Even the most comprehensive map cannot contain all the details of a territory. Art that has come from a place, and which refers to a place, must also acknowledge its own exile. It leaves, it does not remain left behind, but the success of its movement is bitter-sweet. The representation of place will always conceal more than it will reveal. It is not just the practical impossibility of everything from one place fitting into another, but also the different manners for response. Maps require at least two levels of reading, the *topos* and the *tropos*, for getting from one place to another.

The tension in mapping is analogous to writing about the small gestures of art. The place of art and the manner of writing have no symmetrical correspondence. There is no fixed hierarchy. No stable order. If writing just follows art it remains a shadow. If it proceeds, it can advance like a stereotype. Only when both reach for a common space can the parallel lines of different practices find a resonance. Topography could be a form of writing that provokes the imaginary and evokes the real sensation of art and landscape. The aim of topography is not to recount stories of previous adventures, it is more concerned with the tracks and traces which are still visible and portable. Topography is also concerned with the mapping of invented signs that have no genealogical reference but rather a phantasmagorical relationship to place. The origin of signs

can be endless and melancholic. To break from this regress, topography focuses on what happens when small gestures are made in a specific place. The placement of art in the landscape and the replacing of art in the museum do not always carry the burden of a landmark statement. It is not a gesture that commands attention towards the appreciation of grand views, or simply seeks to retell the heroic stories of the past. Topography is a form of writing that I have developed in order to extend the artist's invitation to the public. I ask the reader to put themselves in the place of the artist and participate in the *en*-placement of art with everyday life.

Just before the opening of his exhibition *International Waters*, Roger Palmer commented to me: 'I can see why you wanted to come and hang out during the installation of this work. Watching you wander around the space and this city I can see that you work in a way that is similar to mine.' Most of the essays in this collection were written between 1998 and 2000. During this period I divided my time between Melbourne, as a freelance critic, and Manchester, where I enjoyed the privilege of being a research fellow at the University of Manchester. The majority of these essays were first published in catalogues that were dedicated to the work of an artist. In the process of writing I have often benefited from the responses of the artist. In many instances the only durable aspect of the artist's work was the catalogue. In such circumstances, to write about an exhibition that is composed of an assemblage of materials found on site, and whose duration is confined to the period of display, not only adds a sense of urgency, but also poses poignant questions about the boundaries of an artwork and the role of the writer. In each essay there is the intention to communicate both a response to propositions in the artist's work and an extension of a set of ideas that have been developing in the context of my own research. Through these 'collaborative' essays, I have developed a method of research which not only requires a close understanding of the artist's practice and socio-cultural context—which is a standard method in art history and

visual criticism—but also have striven to engage with the spatial dynamics of the sites in which the artist produces and positions their art. I have not assumed the position of the detached historian, because in most instances I have felt implicated in the scene of the work. In ideal circumstances the partnership moves away from the position of a neutral witness and heads toward the more dynamic role of collaborator. I acknowledge this complicity, not to draw attention to the limits of my own objectivity, but to point to a need to re-conceptualize the relationship between discourse and practice, theory and art. In the course of writing these essays my own perspective on art and its place in urban life was modified and developed, and it is my hope that this process is visible in the reading of this book. As many of the insights have an origin that is beyond the direct exchanges with artists, responsibility for the shortcomings must return to me.



1. PAVEL BUCHLER, 'SWEARING ALOUD' ,
PORTFOLIO GALLERY, EDINBURGH 1997.

PART I

‘EVERYTHING THAT
SURROUNDS’

ART, POLITICS, AND THEORIES
OF THE EVERYDAY

It is indeed unprejudiced observation, bold and at the same time delicate, very much in the spirit of Goethe’s remark: ‘There is a delicate form of the empirical which identifies itself so intimately with its object that it thereby becomes theory.’

Walter Benjamin

We are all foreigners on the inside—*but there is no outside.*

Michel de Certeau

1. THE BOUNDARIES OF ART

The look of art has never been so wayward and the content of art never so diverse as it is now. There is hardly any shock value left in the idea of art that takes its material from the detritus of industry, the margins of colonized cultures, or the ghosts and monsters in the personal unconscious. The range of artistic methodologies and material has expanded exponentially in the past decades. Any comprehensive survey of the contemporary art scene in a global city like London, or even a provincial city like Melbourne, would baffle critics who insist on a rigid typology for the classification of art. The modernist boundaries that regulated the meaning of art according to a binary division between high and low, political and poetic, western and exotic, have been shifted. The once radical gestures of the avant-garde have been selectively incorporated by the new media industries. The growing traffic of artists from non-Western countries into the institutions of contemporary art is intermittently disrupting the conventional maps of Western hegemony. At any point, the contemporary art scene is not just being criss-crossed by different people with their distinctive cultural symbols, but also presenting viewers with the challenge of acknowledging the multiplicity of perspectives for seeing the world. Even art which begins from the position of the everyday cannot rest on a stable distinction between the foreign and the

familiar. Whose everyday is being referenced in contemporary art? What can be taken for granted in everyday life? One British critic's list of 'what's on' does not end with poignant reflexivity over the ontological question, 'what is art today?', but makes a manic turn to face the shifting 'place of art'.

The May Day demonstrations; One Day in September; Johan Grimonprez's skyjacket installation, Inflight, at Anthony d'Offay; plastic tubing pinned to a trashed basement wall in the shape of a gun, pumping blood in Shoreditch Town Hall's hosting of new Portuguese installations; or Richard Bradbury's bronze tank tree, Forty Dead (from Bloomberg New Contemporaries 2000). These are part of a palpably human response to the sitelessness of contemporary conflict—or rather a singular, environment totality which renders it especially unlocatable—that feeds into the current cultural production, across all media. Exhibited, published or broadcast, these works briefly contain the torrent, siting it, naming it, holding it just long enough to tag, and with lick, propose its attributes, its distinctive local effects. The gallery site here is both crime scene and incident room.¹

To define the contemporary gallery as a forensic site in which the blasted consequences of social life are reassembled may appear extreme, but it does point to a radical shift in the relationship between the sites of aesthetic production and public display. Art is no longer solely produced in messy studios and then presented in the contemplative white cubed space of the modernist gallery. The traditional boundaries that regulated the flows from studio-based art to the institutions of display have been either bypassed or redefined. These shifts have also challenged the representation of the place of art in the everyday.

The placement of art in everyday surroundings, and the use of

everyday materials in art, has created the need for new critical tools to determine its aesthetic value and social meaning. The traditional methods for determining the relevance of place and the materiality of art have been pushed to new limits. Art history, especially in relation to painting, has often examined the context of production and analysed the representation of place. Establishing the connection between the background of an image, and the origins of the artist, and the subsequent meanings of the artwork, is not always sufficient. The mapping of biographical or social influence onto the meaning of the art not only requires a more sophisticated grasp of psycho-social connections, but also an appreciation of how the symbolic fields that define a sense of place have been radically altered by new geopolitical and technological forces. The cultural field of globalization can no longer be mapped by the binary categories of early modernism. For instance, a decade of critical writing in the journal *Third Text* has argued that the status of contemporary artists cannot be differentiated according to the racist and metropolitan *a priori* categories that confined the production of contemporary art to a Euro-American axis. A genuinely global approach to contemporary art is not only constrained by the prevailing prejudices and cultural limitations of art historians but also checked by the intellectual constraints of the discipline.

The early debates on the social context of art were bound by narrow empirical models of causality. Given art history's institutional nervousness with the present and its hesitancy to enter the physical spaces of production, there is little surprise that critics like Janet Wolff attack the discipline for reifying the context and mystifying the process of art.² When art historians have acknowledged the need for a sociological perspective, they have tended to restrict it to one which can measure the direct social and political influences on the production of art. Paul Carter has, in a recent essay, noted the poverty of sociological accounts of art that 'reduce the art work to the sum of its sources (iconographic, literary, histori-

cal and biographical) and cancel out the difference that the work intends to make.³ It is important to rethink the relationship between contemporary art, place and the everyday in ways that go beyond the parameters of causal influence. Place and the everyday need to be understood as being constitutive in the production of contemporary art. The place in which contemporary art is displayed, and the material from which it is produced, are intertwined with the process of its production and reception. We need to develop new models for discussing art that are made from the materials that are available in the place of its encounter. These artworks, which are in the narrow sense often categorized as ‘interventions’, also raise complex questions about the role of locality and the artist’s attachment to a place. These questions are especially poignant when the artist does not belong to the specific place in which he or she works, or employs objects from a number of different places.

In more recent debates, art historians have borrowed models from post-structuralist theories in order to address the constitutive role of discursive practices. These theories, while drawing from semiotics and psychoanalysis, tended to overlook the spatial dynamics of contemporary art. John Tagg recognized the need for art history to engage with these issues when he recast his own theoretical coordinates to include Foucault’s early writing on space and de Certeau’s theory of spatial narratives.⁴ The aim was to rethink the idea of the contemporary, not only in terms of temporal succession, but also as a contradictory and discontinuous terrain. Artists had already transformed their own methodologies. By the 1990s it was commonplace for artists to make work which involved a direct engagement with the discursive field. The past was not presented in what Foucault called a ‘monumental’ form but as a ‘document’ which was part of a dialogue in the present, and the artists also insisted that the experience of art could not be separated from the other social activities of living and walking through city spaces.

What this chapter will provide, and the book in more general ways develop, is a method for responding to the art which begins with the place of the everyday. One of the fundamental challenges for writing on contemporary art is the understanding of the place of encounter. When writing on or about art in this book, it is not my intention to either explain the work of art by simply revealing the journeys of the artist, or to exclude the subjectivity of the artist from their art. The form and content of art does not emerge from a social void. Throughout the twentieth century art historians have been locked in battle over the need to either politicize the message in the content, or refine the appreciation of the form of art. Unlike the new trends in the disciplines of anthropology and sociology or the cross-disciplinary work in cultural studies, which have produced robust models for thinking about the dynamic exchanges between the local and the global, art history has tended to either cling onto the more mournful versions of critical theory, or resurrect an anti-theoretical celebration of the artist as genius. In the context of globalization, I believe that it is necessary to extend the debates on the form and content of art by addressing the spatial dynamics of the everyday. By focusing on place and the everyday I am also seeking to reactivate the 'dead' debates on the ideology and autonomy of art.

2. GLOBALIZATION AND ART OF THE EVERYDAY

In the context of globalization, the politics of place has not disappeared as was predicted by the cyber-enthusiasts, but nevertheless the meaning and uses of specific places have been transformed.¹ According to the urban theorist Saskia Sassen, global cities are now closer to each other than they are to the regions of their own states.² Sociologists like Zygmunt Bauman have also noted that these urban and technological changes are occurring in conjunction with a new set of codes for defining the personal attachments to place.³ A mixture of signs and concepts that are drawn from both local and global sources increasingly shapes everyday culture. Global corporations, transnational agencies and international institutions are transmitting messages with greater frequency to communities across the world. This mixture of hybrid and global symbols is now being internalized within the cultural identities of people across the world. Anthropologists like Arjun Appadurai and Nestor García Canclini have both suggested that the incorporation of hegemonic cultural products into indigenous cultures does not necessarily diminish the vitality of the local, or elevate the global as the new universal, but is seen as a sign of the broader process of cultural hybridization and translation.⁴ These new anthropological accounts of cultural exchange have none of the mournful tone that dominates much of the recent

writing in critical theory; they also make the broader methodological point that conventional models for mapping culture, in relation to fixed geographic boundaries, fail to grasp the deterritorialization of contemporary culture. In my own study on globalization and cultural identity I have also argued that the patterns of cultural exchange, like the jagged routes of global migration, are appearing to be structured by semi-chaotic and turbulent forces.⁵

The uneven patterns of cultural exchange across the globe are also accentuated by the new levels of economic polarization and political disenfranchisement. While the majority of people in the world have never been connected to even the most basic forms of telephonic communication, the elites in the metropolitan centres are benefiting from advances in information technology that are proceeding at breakneck speeds. Changes in global centres are not driven by human needs but from what Lyotard calls the 'motricity' of invention. The contradictory terrain and forces of globalization can be outlined through a number of social, political and cultural transformations. Governments complain of the rootlessness of global capital while removing protective barriers for local industries. Migrants are on the move in unprecedented numbers, despite the knowledge that they will be subjected to draconian restrictions. If the rhetoric of globalization is defined by the promises of mobility and interactivity, then it is equally clear that its social underbelly is framed by new forms of surveillance and militarization. Community watch groups, company security firms, national coastal guards and customs officers are all on alert. Fear is ambient. Stalkers, homeless people, criminals, delinquents, illegal migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are all placed on a continuum of stigma. In a world in which the moral codes and social values are in crisis, the distinctions between the victim and the aggressor are increasingly blurred. An index of growing discontent with the consequences of globalization was the outburst of new protest movements across the world in places like Seattle,

Prague and Melbourne. The photographer Allan Sekula, who set out to document the different faces that were mobilized in Seattle, described his roving methodology:

The rule of thumb for this sort of anti-photojournalism: no flash, no telephoto zoom lens, no gas mask, no auto-focus, no press pass and no pressure to grab at all costs the one defining image of dramatic violence. Later, working at the light table, and reading the increasingly stereotypical descriptions of the new face of protest, I realized all the more that a simple descriptive physiognomy was warranted. The alliance on the streets was indeed stranger, more varied and inspired than could be conveyed by cute alliterative play with 'teamsters' and 'turtle'.⁶

The politics of place is being contested in ways that exceed the conventional political opposition between left and right. In the face of urgent responses to either ecological needs or the growing force of global corporatism, neither socialism nor liberalism is seen as offering solid foundations for critical responses. There is no established party in the Western world which is opposed to globalization. In the absence of a formal expression of political alternatives there is an increase in the number of informal movements which have clustered around the critical issues of social justice, cultural identity and ecological defence. These movements are like clusters composed of a diverse range of individuals and groups. Clusters do not assume the forms of institutional political bodies. They are fluid and relatively open-ended. Critics often confuse the amorphous structure of a cluster with the presumption that its members lack conviction and that it cannot generate a sustainable momentum. This failure to recognize the shape of a new political movement is further compounded by the judgement that fragmentary alliances and tactical gestures are the signs of the absence of politics. Artists have resisted this demand to reproduce

the hegemonic structures in their own political participation. They see that the dominant political forms are in themselves undergoing a crisis. Artists have not just observed the ascendance of a new discourse that undermines the sovereignty of the nation-state as it privileges the economic rationalism of the new world order, but they have also noted a new form of stuttering hesitance in the voice of political authority. There is a growing recognition that the pattern of exchange between the global and the local is not only haphazard but that even political leaders are unclear of the consequences of their own reactions. A centralized and coordinated plan of action is missing. This demands new models of artistic and political action. One artistic group from Austria, in an exhibition titled ‘What does it mean when a whole culture dreams the same dream?’, described their methodology for reclaiming a sense of place through the metaphor of a ‘cluster’:

We start by laying everything out in front of us. Then we build clusters. We place scientific discoveries next to profiles of serial killers, and paranormal phenomena alongside documents of governmental abuses of power. We see stories that border on the occult, survive as urban legends, resurface in mainstream cinema, and are taken up by the CIA, and become parts of our dreams. We face stories that are forgotten, waiting for their reintroduction. We are not detectives. There is nobody pulling the strings. The ‘big picture’ will remain elusive. We are happy to find at least one counterpart to each fragment. There are always pieces missing and some won’t fit. Unless we reshuffle and begin again.⁷

This incessant reshuffling of the pack of local myths and global symbols captures the risks inherent in the wager of globalization. The promises of globalization rebounded with phrases like ‘interconnectivity’ but the immediate realities are of increased exclusion and heightened polarization. These profound social and economic

changes have been paralleled by cultural and aesthetic shifts. As artists increasingly utilize the found objects from global commerce and re-utilize the received ideas from the broader media culture, this also necessitates the creation of new critical models for the representation of contemporary art.

Our understanding of the artistic representations of place, and the place for art in contemporary society, is implicated in the 'new world order' of globalization. The uneven patterns of global cultural exchange can be witnessed in the representations of the everyday. As the relationship between the politics of place and cultural codes are redefined by, and against, new global coordinates, so will the aesthetic parameters and the constitution of the symbolic field of the everyday be transformed.

Art is never outside of or above the dynamic field of social change, it never develops in a purely autonomous manner. I would also stress that art is never entirely determined by its social context, for while it appropriates symbols from across the cultural spectrum it remains a critical vector in the representation of contemporary society. However, the manner of its engagement within this field needs further clarification. The central contention of this book is that art is neither the simulated mask which conceals, nor the rhetorical arm which reveals the political struggle: its function is not confined to either dramatizing the repressive or reflecting the inequitable forces of social life. This does not mean that art is disassociated from the representation of utopian visions. Rather, it implies that the recruitment of art in the politics of oppositionality does not fall into a pre-set position. Such a robust view on the relationship between art and politics is often lacking in contemporary critical theory. It is now fashionable to complain about the absence of 'heroic' artists, dwell on the impossibility of politics, or ponder the unrepresentability of the sublime in art. For instance, the philosopher J. M. Bernstein, while lamenting the limited political utility of art, also sought to redefine its social contribution in terms of an 'ethical commitment'.

However, this attempt to redeem the social value of art repeats the false assumption that art, politics and ethics are already external to each other. Bernstein's view may not be so melancholic were it not for the prior assumption that the 'bridge' between art and politics has been lost.⁸ There is no bridge that connects art and politics. Bridging is part of the politics of art.

I would argue that art does participate in the political through its own internal process of extending the language of resistance and representation. A dialogue between art and politics presupposes an open horizon between actuality and possibility. When art challenges the boundaries by which we understand the aesthetics of the everyday, and combines this experience with a new understanding of connection to our surrounding world, then it could be argued to have expanded the sphere of politics. The critical work of art is related to its ability to expand the contours of perception and experience, rather than to reinforce or accentuate political views on existing social divisions. Art is doing its work not when it is serving external objectives but through its own representation of ideas. While the content of art is derived from, and always returns to, society, its significance can only be grasped within a framework that includes the interplay of social and symbolic processes. As a sign that is made in society, art always has a historical consciousness; however this consciousness is often only articulated through the non-literal work performed on the material content of art. The historical consciousness of contemporary art thus must be understood through the complex and diverse ways in which the material for art and the place of art is in a process of symbolic feedback.

Recent debates on the concept of the everyday have only partially grasped the spatial dynamics on the politics of art. Cultural theorists have tended to adopt narrow semiotic models that compare the appropriation of non-aesthetic cultural symbols into the discourse of art to the evolution of language. In this book I explore examples of art from across the world that engage the

everyday and represent place in ways which are not so easily categorized. This essay will evaluate different artistic and curatorial practices in the UK and Australia, in the light of a broader discussion on the concept of the everyday. The aim of this discussion on the concept of the everyday is not to establish it as the master trope but, rather, challenge the facile assumption that art which refers to the everyday can bypass its own social and intellectual history. To make art that addresses the here and now is not a form of escape, but a form of critical practice which has a complex theoretical and political context.

3. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE EVERYDAY

For most of the twentieth century, the concept of the 'everyday' lay submerged as a minor concept in the sociological tradition. It was popularized in the 1980s by debates in cultural studies and subsequently introduced into the discourse of contemporary art in the mid to late 1990s. The reclamation of the concept of the everyday followed a period of theoretical hesitation and uncertainty. After decades of intense theoretical contestation over the relationship between art, power and discourse, there was a hiatus in the writing on the significance of the social context of art. The introduction of the concept of the everyday seemed like a neutral concept for addressing the diverse forms of artistic practice. If the relationship between art, politics and theory was at an impasse, then it was assumed that the concept of the everyday could reveal the specific forms of lived experience that shape artistic production and engage politics without introducing a theory with a predetermined ideological agenda.

While the popular use of the concept of the everyday may have helped acknowledge the specific location of art and its relation to other social activities, there was little appreciation of its own place within the history of ideas. The concept of the everyday can only appear neutral if its meaning is confined to common-sense uses. At various points in the twentieth century, the concept of the

everyday shifted from a mere descriptor of the prosaic elements in social life, to becoming a critical category for not only confronting the materiality and totality of the contemporary culture, but also a means of redefining reality for the purposes of social transformation. The Russian formalists were amongst the first artists to rethink the relationship between art and the everyday. By asserting that art was always in dialectical relation to other cultural developments, they invented new artistic practices which were a direct engagement with the materiality of industry and the forms of the mass media. The shifts in the understanding of the everyday were not confined to the visual artist, for, as John Roberts noted, during the early phases of the Russian Revolution both Lenin and Trotsky recognized the significance of a critical portrayal of the everyday. They believed that literature, film and theatre could stage 'proletarian culture' from within a new universalist perspective:

The everyday was not something that was to be constructed out of a narrow experience of working-class culture, but out of the resources of world culture, to which the forms of European bourgeois culture were a particularly rich contribution and, along with world culture as a whole, the just inheritance of the working class as the vanguard of humanity.¹

When placed in relation to the history of the avant-garde, the concept of the everyday also enables the re-evaluation of a series of practices which mainstream culture may have considered trivial or marginal. From the dadaists and the surrealists, to the situationist and fluxus movements, there have been ongoing experiments which sought to subvert the conventional use of the everyday objects and associations in modern art. At the centre of these experiments was not just a documentation of the artifacts and customs of the modern world, but also the joining together of

artistic practice with new industrial techniques in order to liberate the creative potential in modern life. These artistic collaborations were seen as a vital counter-force against the homogenization of culture and the pacification of subjectivity in modernity. The perceptual habits that were developed in urban life were seen as 'problems'. The early twentieth-century German sociologist Georg Simmel described this muting of critical powers as a corollary of the blasé attitude in the modern city. Maurice Blanchot accentuated this insight when he defined the dominant effect of modern culture as producing 'boredom', a form of consciousness in which images lose their form and the 'citizen in us' is put to sleep:

There results from this a perilous irresponsibility. The everyday, where one lives as though outside the true and the false, is a level of life where what reigns is the refusal to be different, a yet undetermined stir: without responsibility and without authority, without direction and without decision, a storehouse of anarchy, since casting aside all beginning and dismissing all end. This is the everyday. And the man in the street is fundamentally irresponsible; while having always seen everything, he is witness to nothing. He knows all, but cannot answer for it, not through cowardice, but because he takes it all lightly and because he is not really there. Who is there when the man on the street is there?²

Through the tactics of shock, juxtaposition and interaction modern artists sought to awaken the 'citizen in us'. For Blanchot, everyday life had become wrapped in a series of mental, political and cultural straitjackets. Art was seen as a means for exposing the totalitarian underside of the social imaginary and for stimulating critical modes of perception. Attention to the role of the arbitrary and the unconscious in the everyday became invested with political and psychic dimensions. In order to break out of the strictures of convention, the function of art expanded from the transmission

of a particular message to the transformation of the viewer's mode of attention. The avant-garde was to lead in the transformation of everyday consciousness. By representing familiar objects from unexpected positions they not only sought to reveal hidden poetry but also unleash a new revolutionary understanding of reality. These ambitions were to underpin many of the debates on the role of the artist. However, despite a long tradition of avant-garde experimentation, and the repeated efforts to break the divide between popular culture and high art, the concept of the everyday has remained relatively untheorized within the contemporary discourse of art. Most of the theoretical work on the concept of the everyday was undertaken in sociology, philosophy and psychoanalysis.

As a sociological concept, the everyday is clearly opposed to other concepts which emphasized structural, transcendental or ahistorical forces. The concept of the everyday was not a retreat or an escape from the social, but a means of rethinking the relationship between the particular and the general, or how attention to the details of daily life can reveal an insight into the broader system. Yet, when applied to art, the concept of the everyday was perceived as being distinctive from earlier theoretical models in that it did not seek to confine the significance of art within the *a priori* categories of a given political ideology, nor explain art's meaning according to predetermined psychoanalytic and philosophical categories. To consider art from the perspective of the everyday is to stress that the measure of art is not found by borrowing the yardsticks of other discourses, but rather from its articulation and practices within everyday life. Yet, this aim, which seeks to take us directly into the lifeworld, without the mediation of other discourses, cannot be conducted in pure form. There is never a direct access to the representations of everyday life. Theories of language, culture, and the psyche are always inextricably interwoven in our every effort to represent the details of everyday life. While the concept of the everyday may have

appeared as a novel way to articulate the context of artistic practice, it is important to remember that it was embedded in longstanding sociological and philosophical debates on *praxis*. Within the art historical discourse on ‘art and the everyday’ there is a decisive step from the art of living to the politics of social transformation. The critical reaction against realism at the end of the nineteenth century and the associated attempts to expand the subject matter of fine art, were also motivated by a re-evaluation of the bourgeois distinctions between the noble and the ordinary, the beautiful and the scarred, the refined and the prosaic.³ Champions of modernism like Baudelaire were to stress the vital representation of the ‘everyday’. It is not my aim to illustrate how artists have either grappled with this process, or striven to energize the nodal points between art and the everyday, but rather to contextualize this concept within a number of earlier debates. As Scott McQuire pointed out:

While the term ‘everyday’ has longstanding oppositional connotations, stemming from its usage in Marxist sociology (notably Henri Lefebvre’s 1947 *Critique of Everyday Life*) and passing, by way of phenomenology and the Situationist International (Raoul Vaneigem’s *The Revolution of Everyday Life* published in 1967 was the companion volume to Guy Debrord’s *Society of the Spectacle*), into the doxa of contemporary cultural studies, what it represents has undergone significant mutations in the passage.⁴

The genealogy of the concept of the everyday could be traced much further back, and the net cast more widely. Mike Featherstone finds echoes of the concept from antiquity, and draws on phenomenological as well as Marxist traditions.⁵ The Ancient Greek philosophers paid meticulous attention, and were in ongoing debate, about what made the ‘good life’. In the phenomenological tradition, the term ‘lifeworld’ has a central role, and when Alfred

Schutz first introduced it to sociology he defined it in relation to the heterogeneity of attitudes in action and thinking, which were in contrast with the dominant institutionalized actions and rationalized modes of thinking. Agnes Heller's attempt to synthesize both the phenomenological and Marxist traditions of the everyday lead her to characterize it as 'encompassing different attitudes, including reflective attitudes'. These attitudes are not just those which situate the self and help make sense of the world, but also include those imbued with critical force that are capable of offering a vision of a 'better world'. In her definition, everyday life is seen as the co-constitution of self and society. It is the aggregate of both the attitudes that shape the self and the processes of shaping the world.⁶

While the everyday is a sort of amoeba concept, its contents and contours varying according to the content it absorbs and surrounds, it needs to be stressed that it is not somehow outside of theory or politics. The concept of the everyday is not boundless. While it was defined in opposition to the unidirectional or reductive theories of social change, it was not proposed in order to argue that there were spaces which were totally open-ended and free from institutional constraints. The parameters of the everyday can be sharpened by positing its relation to its counter: the non-everyday.

In sociology, particularly within the ethnomethodological tradition,⁷ the concept of the everyday was used to check the use of theory against either a prescriptive modelling of the world, or a totalising abstraction which determines the precise order of causes and consequences. The concept of the everyday also played an important role in the rethinking of the 'place' of theory. If we understand theory as operating *within*, rather than above, or beyond, a specific context, then this perspective, which implicates the process of representation within the structures and institutions of belonging, would enable a level of critique which also attends to the precise configuration of the flows and tensions within social

relations. A theory of the everyday is thus located in the *in between* spaces, the interstices, the margins and the disjunctive zones of the social. The location and expression of the everyday was identified, for instance, in the way workers seize the moments that break their drudging routines, the discovery of unintended pleasures in mass cultural products, the transformation of a foreign space into the private place called home, or even the deep embrace of a pop song as a personal anthem. The focus of the everyday sought to demonstrate that there were pockets of resistance, tactics of adaptation and reflexive forms of agency which were overlooked by the essentializing and structuralist models of social theory.

Given the restless and disruptive dynamic of modernity, it is a modality which is particularly well suited to grasping the experience of displacement and rupture that is symptomatic of our age. The concept of the everyday in critical theory was closely linked to the tension between freedom and alienation in modernity. The more pessimistic veins of Marxist theory, in particular theorists influenced by the negative side of Adorno's writing on culture, tended to see the everyday, at best, as complicitous with the coercive forces of modernity, or even worse, as an expression of the false political reconciliations that are possible under capitalism. By contrast Henri Lefebvre was among the first to emphasize that the concept of everyday life was a positive supplement to Marx's concept of alienation.⁸ While recognizing that capitalism creates social relations which alienate subjects from their 'species being' and from others, Lefebvre also stressed that the concept of everyday life can illuminate the complex ways in which subjects exercise their potential to be emancipatory and critical. Thus, Lefebvre created a new space within the Marxist tradition. For Lefebvre the significance of the concept of the everyday lies in the way it points to overcoming alienation. Lefebvre was convinced that alienation would not be overcome by political change alone. On the contrary, he noted that under Stalinism it deepened. Lefebvre saw the energy within the every-

day in luminous terms. Unlike the idealists who expressed nothing but haughty disdain towards the everyday, Lefebvre believed that an imaginative engagement with everyday life could stimulate the desire for social transformation. He stressed that popular art forms like film and photography contained both radical content and presented glimmers of hope for the renewal of a Marxist cultural theory.

Lefebvre's theory of the everyday was, however, limited by the uncritical repetition of two flaws in the Marxist theorization of alienation. First, the theory of self, which served as the counter to alienated subjectivity, presupposed the existence of a unified personality. Second, the privileging of the commodification of labour in the definition of alienation overlooked the domain of non-economic work. Alienation was thus confined to forms of non-reciprocal relationships between an individual and their work. According to Marx, as value is concentrated in the object of work, and as the worker is perceived as another commodity in the chain of production, there is a process which ensues that leads to the externalization of the value of production, the estrangement of the worker from the object of work, the undermining of the worker's sense of worth through production, and the objectification of all social relationships in the workplace. Ultimately, the worker is left feeling alienated from nature, the essence of their own identity, and their consciousness of the totality of all other human relations. Marx thereby argued that the consequences of alienation are the estrangement of the worker from their 'species being'.

In Marx's dialectic, the space of the everyday was defined as the other side of alienation. It is in the space of the everyday, Marx claimed, that the worker, outside of their oppressive work relations, had a genuine sense of self-worth. In this space, Marx believed that there was the possibility of integrating the fragments of the social world with the essence of identity. Heller also continued this line of argument when she stressed that Marx's theory of the self assumed a necessary unity between personality and the

sphere of action that constitutes society. The integrated self was capable of both recognizing the flux and fragmentation of the social world, and providing a critique through the synthesis between its subjectivity and everyday life.

Lefebvre also extends this integrative logic when he defines the concept of the everyday as referring to all the spheres and institutions which in their unity and their totality ‘determine the concrete individual’.⁹ From the choice of leisure to the structure of domesticity, Lefebvre draws our attention to the complex means by which social structures are internalized in daily life. This practice of internalization is neither passive nor neutral. The individual actively transforms the external social structures as they integrate them into their everyday life. This process of internalization has a double effect. It transforms the internal private sphere as it incorporates the external structures, and simultaneously creates a dynamic feedback on the shape of the social. The reciprocal relationship between the part and whole is critical in Lefebvre’s theory. He sees ‘the humble events of everyday life as having two sides’,¹⁰ as being marked by the arbitrariness of the particular, and carrying an essence of the social. By tracing the reproduction of the whole in the practice of the part, Lefebvre thought he found a way out of the base–superstructure model, that was stultifying Marxist debates on culture. However, it was also this double linkage between the particular and the general, where the former was seen as both the counter and the isomorph of the latter, which in turn imposed another form of idealism over the everyday.

Michel de Certeau’s concept of the everyday goes even further and provides a way of understanding the everyday without idealizing the integrative logic that was central to the Marxist tradition. When de Certeau represents an analogy between the part and the whole, he also suggests a displacement effect. He is more attuned to the sly step towards transformation in every act of internalization.

The presence and circulation of a representation ... tells us nothing about what it is for the users. We must first analyze its manipulation by users who are not its makers. Only then can we gauge the difference or similarity between the production of the image and the secondary production hidden in the process of its utilization.¹¹

It is this investigation of the difference between the laws, rituals and representations imposed by the dominant order, and the subversive practices of compliance, adoption and interpretation by the powerless that fuels Michel de Certeau's study of social relations. His concern is not with the intended effects of a social system, but the uses made of it by the people who are operating within it. The politics of the everyday, for de Certeau, is focused towards the micro ways in which people subvert the dominant order. De Certeau tracks two levels of response against the oppressive and homogenizing pressures of modernity. First, the ways in which people make ethical responses to the social order, and thereby humanize their relations with each other. Second, in the face of a social order that constitutes the majority of the people at the margin, he also notes the countering techniques by which the weak make an ingenious and devious use of the strong. These tactical responses are necessary, he argues, since the individual is increasingly situated in a position where the social structures are unstable, boundaries are shifting, and the context is too vast and complex to either control or escape.

From this perspective, de Certeau's concept of the everyday is significantly different from Lefebvre's. Given the complexity and diversity in the social field of the everyday, de Certeau does not claim that the part can carry the essence of the whole. Globalization, through the shift in forms of production, relocation of central command centres, rapid flows of financial and speculative trading across national borders, increasing interpenetration of local cultures by the media industries, and new patterns of

migration, has heightened the complexity and fragmentation of the social order. The identity of the social whole can no longer be represented according to neat categories and discrete boundaries. This re-evaluation of the identity of the whole also complicates the representative status of the part. For instance, can art of the everyday represent the lifeworld of the whole nation? Or do we need to make smaller and more specific claims about the relationship between the particular, which is always a tactical response to a number of conflicting demands, and the whole, which is already too fragmented and complex to appear as a single unit? At the micro level of everyday life, the individual is now compelled to utilize intelligence, cunning and ruse, both in order to survive and to gain pleasure. 'This mutation makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment.'¹²

The metaphor of a house is an apposite one for this exilic epoch. According to de Certeau, our mode of being in this world, that is, our ability to insert ourselves into the present and to make the meaning of our time memorable and affirmative, is like the practice of renting an apartment. The space is borrowed, the structures are given, and the possibility of dwelling is thus not infinite. However, the practice of living is neither closed nor predetermined by the architecture of the building. We enter the apartment with our baggage, furnish it with our memories and hopes, and make changes which give form to our needs and desires. The orders in which our belongings are arranged are like the fingerprints of our social identity.

The home is saturated with emotive associations and social meanings, but unlike those from other historical periods, the contemporary home gains its identity from the oscillation between arrival and departure, integration and fragmentation. Bauman characterized our relationship to home in late modernity not in terms of displacement but unplacement.¹³ Not only are more people living in places which are remote and unfamiliar to them, even those who have not moved are increasingly feeling estranged

from their sense of place. The concept of home needs to be fused with the fluid practice of belonging. 'Home is no longer a dwelling but the untold story of life being lived.'¹⁴ 'Home' must act as a verb, as well as a noun. For home is no longer confined to either a place in the past, where our sense of origin is fixed to a geographical spot; it also appears as a horizon that eludes the present and compels the search for a new destination. As with all senses of destiny there is an unending effort to approach it but today it never reveals itself in the full and final sense of arrival. The meaning of home now combines the place of origin with the struggle for destiny. To tell the story of the life being lived in the home, we must perform what John Berger calls the 'bricolage of the soul'. When Gaston Bachelard applied the tools of psychoanalysis to the structure of the house, renaming the garret as the superego, the ground level as the ego, and the basement as id, thereby providing us with topoanalysis, he gave us that first look into the soul of architecture.¹⁵ Or was it an insight into the architecture of the soul? Through these figurative techniques Bachelard was to address the practice of making meaning through the assemblage of the fragments that constitute home.

Psychoanalysis, which in Freud's hands was driven to uncover the hidden meanings of the banal and trivial in everyday habits, was lifted out of its therapeutic context by Bachelard and released into the realm of critical poetics. Psychoanalysis can benefit our understanding of the everyday when its application is not just confined to a diagnostic and medical science, but extended to a mode of investigating the psychic drives in the constitution of the social. While all the messy desires and neurotic habits of the everyday cannot be removed by 'working through' their origin in the primal sexual scenes, psychoanalysis has opened the door to our understanding of the repressed in everyday life, provided a great epistemic insight into the orders of the psyche, and exposed the unconscious layers that were obscured by the commonplace distinction between truth and lies. In one of his earliest works,

Psychopathology of Everyday Life, Freud made the point that something was always left out; something remained unspoken, even when the speaker expressed their views sincerely and to the best of their recollection. The meaning of this elusive ‘something’ was for Freud located in the unconscious. Despite Freud’s determined effort to establish psychoanalysis as a science, it is now most valuable as a creative method for excavating the grit from the silent disavowals and recognizing the rub they cause in our experience of the everyday.

The utilization of psychoanalysis and Marxism by the Frankfurt School took an even more decisive role in tracing the ‘itinerary of desire’ in everyday life. Adorno and Horkheimer were conscious of two shifts in the political terrain. Unlike the classical Marxists, they no longer believed that the role of the proletariat resembled that of a vanguard, and they also lost faith in the view that the internal dynamics of history would inevitably lead to the overthrow of the capitalist system. Adorno and Horkheimer sought in psychoanalysis new clues to explain the culture of survival. Their critique against domination and authority was also significantly framed through an emphasis on the redemptive potential of memory. The work of memory was not confined to a nostalgic retreat, but knotted into the emancipatory project of uncovering the elements of subjectivity, and heightening the reflexive attitude that had been suppressed by the instrumental rationalism of the modern world.

From the combined perspective of Marx’s theory of alienation and Freud’s theory of repression, it could now be argued that the dynamics of culture and the role of agency could never be reduced to a merely negative or positive expression of material forms of production. If Marx’s great contribution to social theory was to position the intellectual within the site of struggle, it could be said that Freud’s equally significant epistemic insight was the idea that the analyst must offer his or her body, through the act of transference, as a model for uncovering the meanings of the past and

transforming the everyday. After Marx and Freud the critical distance between the subject and object was redefined. These theories breathed a sense of hope into our understanding of the levels of freedom in the everyday. It produced a new kind of awareness of our own capacity to be attentive to the possibilities within destiny.

The future will be like the past, not in the sense of repetition, but in the sense of having been uncalculated. So one of the aims of analysis is to free people to do nothing to the future but be interested in it.¹⁶

The theorist, the analyst and the artist would no longer need to claim an aloofness from the social in order to evoke a radical position. The relationship between the abstract and the concrete could no longer be thought of as, to use Walter Benjamin's phrase, 'a one-way street'. The culture of the everyday was not a mechanical part that neatly revolved around the pivots of the dominant order. Most significantly the concept of the everyday was a challenge against the structural determinist tendencies in social theory. According to Peter Burger it also represented the basis for the renewal of both the left and the avant-garde as it reintegrated 'art into the praxis of life'.¹⁷ Agents could not be represented as being the mere 'dupes' of an overarching ideology. By drawing attention to the intricate and reciprocal relationship between agency and structure, the theories of the everyday rejected the assumption that change could only be imposed from above, or sustained by purely external forces. The everyday became a concept for understanding how the strategies of resistance in the practices of living were not always explicitly oppositional. The heroics and ethics of the everyday did not appear in either titanic stature or saintly guise; rather they were enacted through subtle acts of involvement and displacement. The spirit of resistance did not always come from beyond or above, but also from *within*.

It is important to stress the limits of individual action. Choice is often confused with freedom, and as a consequence the space of the everyday is exaggerated. The sociological debates on agency and the everyday attempted to trace the radial network and critical feedback mechanisms that interconnect individual choice with social structures. An individual's ability to choose is always framed by a broader context, but these internal practices always impact on the external structures. The flow of influence was thus not seen as emanating only from above, but circulating in turbulent patterns and taking multifarious routes. As people consciously utilize the dominant structures, this creates a double displacement effect: at the micro level their subjectivity is affected, and at the macro the boundaries of the system are modified to accommodate the specific patterns of use. The exterior forces are changed as they are internalized within the individual's subjectivity, producing both a destabilizing effect on the social structures and a displacement of the prior state of identity. The concept of the everyday is thus part of a tradition in identifying the potential for critical practice, and for offering alternative interpretations on what makes the 'good life'.

The key advantage of the concept of the everyday was that it highlighted the potential for transformation at the level of the individual's experience. It showed that radical gestures could also be witnessed in the small steps taken by individuals in the course of their everyday lives. However, as Lois McNay observed, cultural theorists began to stretch the emancipatory potential of the everyday and fetishize the micro-revolutionary gestures of individual practices.¹⁸ According to McNay, the critical dimensions of cultural theory have been disproportionately focused towards the small gestures of the individual. Hybrid identities formed out of the contradictory forces of everyday life were seen as the ideal form of survival, rather than as a critique of the broader structures. By stressing the liberties and pleasures found in 'counter-cultural' activities, theorists began to blur the polit-

ical process of contestation. It elevated the agency of the individual and evaded discussion of the structural limits in the collective assumption of power.

4. THE POLITICS OF ART

The concept of the everyday offered a new starting point for the discussion of art and its context. It enabled a closer understanding of the interweaving of the local and the global, the materiality and location of art, as well as providing a new conceptual framework for interpreting so-called populist art forms like video and photography, without having to 'read' them in the classical manner of painting. The introduction of the concept of the everyday into the discourse of art came late, considering the longstanding practice of artistic experimentation with the everyday. It was, however, timely in relation to the theoretical impasse concerning the relationship between art and politics.

While ideological differences over directions for political engagement and the idealist vision of art as pure form have characterized the two fundamental opposing positions in the discourse on art, in the 1980s the critical position on art shifted from thinking about its relationship to political economy to understanding the way art operated as a language. Barthes' writing on representation and myth, Althusser's model of ideology and perception, Bourdieu's theory of agency and cultural capital, Lacan's revision of the psychoanalytic theories of identity, and Derrida's writing on difference in his deconstruction of philosophy, collectively provided new conceptual tools for understanding the discursive relationship of art

and politics. Throughout these debates in the 1980s, the key issues shifted to the structural rules and ontological questions of art. As much as the 1970s were preoccupied with understanding the links between art and political struggle, in the 1980s the main concern seemed to focus on the way artists could question the dominant codes of representation and reconfigure the structures of consciousness. Victor Burgin observed that the flow between theory and practice was generally initiated in France and received in Britain through art schools and journals.

Political dissent was not the only French import of the late 1960s and the 1970s; there was also a massive influx of theory...French Marxism, semiotics and psychoanalysis became the radical alternatives to the discourse of art in general, and the empirical-intuitive Anglo-Saxon critical tradition in particular. With the new theory came a rejection of the established 'high art' hierarchies, with film and photography tending to take precedence over literature and painting, and with all forms of 'art' being viewed as part of a broader picture of representational practices in contemporary society. It became impossible to think 'art theory' in isolation from 'theory of ideology'—particularly under the massive theoretical and political impact of feminism.¹

The impact of theory, especially for conceptual artists, led to a broader field of critical practice. According to Burgin, the meaning of art was no longer confined to an appreciation of its technical execution. Critics who could discuss only the painterly qualities of the artist's brushwork were dismissed as reactionary connoisseurs. As the task of art expanded to engage with the whole field of signifying practices, so too theory took a discursive turn. Burgin marked this transition by noting that critical practice had shifted its focus from the 'representation of politics' to the 'politics of representation'.² Artists such as Hans Haacke, Barbara Kruger and

Adrian Piper were no longer seen as simply trying to find a powerful means of representing political struggle, but as developing new strategies that also challenged the codes for representing identity and culture.

Both the radical impact of theory and the significance of new contemporary practice were recognized, at first, only in the margins of the academy. A number of feminist art historians, such as Griselda Pollock, Janet Wolff and Elizabeth Wilson, began to push the intellectual boundaries that defined the social context of art as they critically addressed the representation of women's everyday life. Drawing from the postcolonial writings of Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, art historians such as Sarat Maharaj, as well as the artist/curator/writer Rasheed Araeen, proceeded to question the axioms of cultural exchange and argue for new theoretical frameworks which could relate non-Western aesthetic practices. These new directions in art history had an ambivalent response in the mainstream institutions of art. Just as a number of historical and political arguments were won, the cultural terrain began to shift. By the end of the decade there was a new backlash against theory.

The reaction against theory in the 1990s was different to the hostilities that Burgin had observed in the late 1980s. There were, once again, ample attempts to vulgarize new concepts, by either naïve conflations with the old or spiteful caricature. However, there was also the more bizarre claim that the need for theory was obsolete, and the smug boast that all the vital lessons had been somehow learnt. The ambivalent status of theory was also reproduced in the new practices of young British artists. Many of the theoretical concepts of the earlier debates were partially internalized within their art practice. However, in the public discussion of their practice they vehemently disavowed any link to theoretical or political engagement. During the early 1990s, certainly in the contemporary art scene in London, the disavowal of the role of theory in art produced some notable defensive reactions. In the face

of the debates led by feminist and postcolonial theorists on the implication of art within social and cultural forces, or to be more precise the 'Saatchinization' of British art, there was a new push towards an apolitical and anti-intellectual stance. No sooner had the artworld entered a number of sociological or political concepts into its glossary, than there was another brash, aggressive, narcissistic counter-tendency, which explicitly renounced the need for either theoretical sophistication, or political gesturing. This disavowal coincided with the successive demise of socialist regimes in the Eastern Bloc, and the collapse of traditional working-class structures that accompanied the process of de-industrialization in the West. The combined effect of these radical geopolitical and socio-economic shifts was a broadening of what Jean-François Lyotard had earlier described as the 'loss of faith' in the grand narratives of modernity. The revolutionary calls to struggle that were so resonant in the late 1960s began to sound hollow, tired and pointless. For the new generation of artists a direct response to popular culture seemed more authentic and appealing than a workshop for the theoretical analysis of the 'class struggle'. We had entered a phase in which the artwork sought to aspire to a condition that the very articulate critic Andrew Renton described as 'dumb muteness'.

From the artist-led exhibitions *Freeze*, *Minky Manky*, *Sick*, *Cocaine Orgasm*, the international exhibition *Brilliant*, and finally to the display of the Saatchi collection in the Royal Academy exhibition *Sensation*, much of the critical response to the new British art tended to focus on the energy and exuberance of youth. There was a willingness by critics and curators, who were invariably well beyond the cusp of youth and advancing into their middle age, not only to join in the celebration of spontaneity, quasi-mystical invocations of the natural, perverse sexual identities, scatological practices, populist sporting and cultural heroes, but also actively to promote this within the international artworld, as the new pinnacle of British art. Professional curators and critics, who

increasingly see themselves as collaborators in the production of art and have an investment in the legitimacy of their practice, were seemingly glad to embrace a new art practice which was sticking its middle finger at professionalism and could not give a ‘fuck’ about legitimacy. Amongst the members of the more established artworld circles, who were always reluctant to engage in theoretical discourses or resistant to discussing politics, there was a collective sigh of relief when the new art announced itself as purged from theoretical and political pretensions. Here was work that didn’t require a bit more Deleuze and Guattari³ before it could be displayed. What is of significance here is the presumption that art had finally escaped the boundaries of politics and theory. Or put another way, the tyranny of politics and the burden of theory had finally been overthrown. It is my view that this disavowal of the idea of theory and politics from the context of art is not only linked to the commercial success but also led to a burgeoning of vapid and superficial practices. During this period, the supposed obsolescence of politics and theory was supported by a general misreading of the revival of the international market for British art as a sign of the renewal of art in Britain.⁴ It was also supported by critics such as John Roberts, who argued that the earlier ‘invasion’ of French theory had both undermined the credibility and diverted the creative attention of contemporary artists. Arguing against the grain of postmodernism, which he interpreted as the dominant theoretical force in art discourse, Roberts developed a counter-critical position, which he called ‘philistinism’:

From this perspective, the decisive change brought about by this work is a loss of guilt in front of popular culture. In this, the conceptual categories and strategies of critical postmodernism (the spectacle, simulation, the deconstruction of representation and identity) are perceived to have distanced artists from the pleasures and contradictions of the everyday. If all visual experience is subject to the law of

‘reification’ and all representation is suspect, the representation of the everyday is always being judged as a problem and in need of critique, rather than a site where ideology and resistance are lived out in all their messy contingency. The critical act of deconstruction makes it difficult for artists to take the truth of their own experience seriously, for it always appears to be invented somewhere else.⁵

Roberts’ anxiety over the disabling influence of theory partially reflects the gap between the academic discourse that was emerging in British art schools, and the appeal of populist culture to a new generation of art students. While the debates on art were marked by an increasingly sophisticated use of structuralist and semiotic theory, mainstream popular culture was also quick to appropriate the ‘shark-infested waters’ of the avant-garde. This slippage reached comic levels when in an advertisement for Ford, one of its cars was suspended in an unmistakably Damien Hirst tank.⁶ While many young British artists such as Gillian Wearing took a more skeptical view of the motivation behind Saatchi’s patronage, and artists such as Michael Landy and Mark Wallinger made work drawn directly from critical theory in an attack on the commercialization of everyday life, critics like John Roberts still insisted that artists should distance themselves from critical engagements that put theory above the material production of art. There is no doubt that there are times when the dialogue between art, politics and theory becomes counter-productive. As early as 1984, John Tagg commented: ‘Perhaps we have seen the formula “Marxism-feminism-psychoanalysis” too often to wonder at what it presumes.’⁷ He recognized the limited impact that theory could have on the institutions of art. The presumption, for instance, that art history could be either redeemed or deconstructed by the confrontation with other methodologies and new conceptual frameworks was short-lived. For a number of artists there was also a definite withdrawal from philosophical investigations and institutional politics, but where to

go? There is no exit from the social field. Debates on the boundaries between art, politics and theory, in an all-too-easy manoeuvre, were either swept into the 'too hard basket', or dumped into the historical dustbin of irrelevance. The rhetorical display of interest in theory or the politics of race and gender, which was certainly evident in the 1980s, was now not even suitable for ornamental purposes. The new aura of 'cool' in the artworld was now framed by an unstated nationalism and conservatism. The compulsion to be reflexive and self-critical that had infused earlier debates was quickly superseded by a desire to be self-absorbed and, as John Roberts put it in a rare moment of frankness, 'artists are finally making work that shows that they are proud to be English'.⁸

However, the fact that the backlash against 'theory envy' in the institutional domain coincided with a steady increase of interest in cultural identities, previously excluded from or positioned at the margins of the mainstream artworld, cannot be overlooked. As the British cultural critic Kobena Mercer argued, the 'other' was made more visible at a time when the conditions for negotiating visibility were being withdrawn.⁹ Attention now turned to art which was more celebratory of its location in the world, and less critical of the social context. It was assumed that the role of the artist had become overburdened by theoretical abstractions and social obligations, or reduced to an obscure footnoting process, and that the message, when visible, had become unbearably pious. The debate with philosophy, psychoanalysis and politics was seen not as producing a more profound, dynamic and interactive art practice, but blocking the very possibility of creativity. To renew the creative drive in art, artists were expected to drop their bookish concerns with the text, and bring art into direct contact with life. Bringing art and everyday life closer together could be a healthy antidote to the academic tendency to reduce all forms of critical practice to language games. However, it could also lead to reproducing the idiocies and banalities of life in the name of art. The relationship between art and life is never a straightforward or transparent one.

As John Slyce observed, the ‘rollback of theory’ could only proceed at the expense of critical awareness:

to banish ‘theory’ from our lives and practices means we stop attempting to understand the world we make and begin to only experience that which we find ourselves in. The representation of the localized, quotidian experience holds out the false promise of transparent access to an assumed-to-be-authentic knowledge of subjectivity.¹⁰

What cannot be denied is the need for artists to start from the materiality of both their art practice and their experience. This appreciation of the materiality of art and life does not preclude language, nor does it imply that the limitations of our specific starting points, by merely being displayed, should be elevated to marvellous achievements. If the young British artists, as precursors of this new tendency, turned away from theory and began to explore with greater self-confidence the boundaries of their own identity, sexuality and culture, we could then ask, where did this licence to play with the self come from? Would it have been possible to embrace the pleasures of being a post-feminist, without the prior struggles of feminism? Would popular culture be part of the materiality of art if there had not been two decades of critical theory which had validated it as a site of historical and theoretical significance? Is the current fascination with the relationship between the self and others not linked to the way in which artists, who were previously excluded from the boundaries of modernism, explored their own hybrid subjectivities?

This is not to say that there is always a debt which must be paid, like a tax which must be attributed by each generation to their antecedents; however, it is necessary to caution against any celebrations of this ‘raw’ energy and exuberance that take the form of naive readings of Oedipal rebellions. What happens when there is not even the memory of other struggles? In the art of, say, Tracey

Emin, there is both sensuous absorption with the present—a shameless fascination with the abject—and a candid representation of the banalities of everyday life. Neither the pleasures nor the vices that are expressive of this voluptuous self-presence are embedded within a social history of political solidarity or aesthetic investigation. Such a practice of acknowledgement is disavowed as being part of the boring politics of correctness. Yet paradoxically, in the assertion of the newness of this new art, there is both a rejection of lineage and the claim of assimilation. It is assumed that the new British art will have already embraced the kernel of the old without hanging on to the academic crust of history. This dynamic of internalization is supposedly already there in the pulse of popular culture. Can we assume that the history of resistance is already incorporated into popular consciousness, and that the production of art, by virtue of its own sensual and material practice, traces the contours of this silent knowledge and bears witness to all that is knowable and real? To attempt to forget the past is to be condemned to repeat it by other means.

Art can never be a prisoner of politics and theory. It is too elusive, mercurial and elaborate to be caught within the confines of another discourse. Art cannot be simply reduced to an example of either a predefined political practice, or a prior theoretical abstraction. It has to be measured in its own terms. The material presence of the artwork itself is where its own constellation of meanings resides. These meanings resound within a broader social context, but the manner in which they ‘speak’ is never direct or transparent. In the past, among certain schools of art theory, there was a tendency to collapse the dialogue between the aesthetic and the social within simplistic schemas. There can be no final resolution to these debates. The two discourses will never merge, because of the fundamental difference that art does not furnish us with a language of measurement other than its own material presence, which, of course, is separate from the language of representation in which critical discourse operates.

While the production and interpretation of art are always situated within a social history, the broader meaning of art lies in the conjunction of perception—in all its sensory forms—with the languages of art historical discourse. The totality of art's meaning is never confined to either the symptom or the consequence of other discourses. Its specificity is located within a social context, but the available concepts of the social are not always adequate for communicating the fullness of its meaning. The meaning in the writing on art can never be the same as the meaning in art. This difference is often overlooked in much of the critical discourse that surrounds art. It is blurred by gleeful writers and slothful artists who assume that their work is interchangeable, or that the former can narrate and validate the latter. It is a common strategy in the art world. Artists seduce writers into establishing links that will connect their work to current theoretical trends. This level of engagement is often crude and parasitic. The connection between art and theory cannot be established through such tactical alliances, but only at deeper levels of conceptual affinity and political urgency. An exchange is at its most vital when art and theory are, as Rupert Sheldrake called it, 'likeminded'; drawn to each other by a complex network of attractions and intangible bonds which fasten their attention to common needs. Both artists and writers seek to communicate with their respective medium. The relationship between the modes of communication needs to be seen as an affinity. Art and writing are two different ways of reaching for truth. There is no final answer or superior mode. Thus, the exchange between art, politics and theory is not like that of antagonists trapped in a militaristic game of surrender and defeat, where the truth of one position can only be grasped by gaining distance from all the configurations that are implied within it. Rather, the relationship between art, politics and theory resembles a rhetorical game between agonists who are in dialogue with each other, who measure each other's truth claims by gaining some critical intimacy with their respective worldviews, and who are bound to

respect the integrity of their mutual differences. The meaning of art does not come just from within: it also comes from without, from the parallel, or even contrapuntal, efforts to investigate the third space within the realms of action and reflection. In an attempt to define the third space for theory, John Tagg stressed the disjunctive processes of movement and the comparative effects of resistance:

Theory moves in this space. It travels and arrives, is received and rebuffed. It is constantly translated, appropriated, adapted, assimilated, passed on and contested. This very mobility confronts it with relations of power that seek to structure translations...But the confrontation of theory and power also opens movements of resistance that unseat claims to universality and flush out the unlocated voice that denies its contingency and partiality and speaks, above our heads, to its historyless, raceless, genderless, bodyless listeners.¹¹

Paul Carter has also argued for a third position in the discourses on art and its relationship to language. He has noted that art history is caught in a binary division over the utility of theory. One side perceives theory as another wall which blocks art from its own material process, while the other side elevates theory as the bridge which will connect art with the social world. On both sides is the assumption that art is intrinsically silent and isolated from the normal languages and practices of everyday life. As Carter astutely observed, on both sides there is the common assumption that art is already separated from the social world, and the belief that 'discourse about art is foreign to the art making process'. A more complex understanding of the common space between theory and art is obscured by this opposition. As Carter also remarks there is a need to recognize the dialogic relationship between art and theory.

In the dialogue between language and plastic form ideas do not mimic images. They do not colonize and misrepresent. Nor must images seek to promote a utopian seeing. Collaboration occurs not in the production of imagery, but in the exploration of a shared eidetic curiosity.¹²

Much of the confusion over the political meaning of art is related to the ambiguous social position that is claimed for or by artists. The value of art is often driven by myths about the origins and experiences of the artist. To overcome this conflation between the transcendence of the artwork and the artist's social position, the critical theorists of the Frankfurt School attempted to measure the impact of the avant-garde on contemporary culture in terms of its oppositionality to the dominant culture, and defined the social position of artists in dualistic terms—they were both at the centre and along the margins. While Walter Benjamin evoked the mysterious ways in which artists could imaginatively recreate the past to critique the present with a lightness of touch, and Theodor Adorno's sense of the aesthetic was resolutely policed by a patrician austerity against the vulgarizing forces of the commercial world, they nevertheless developed a dialectical understanding of the transformative and redemptive role of art in everyday life. Art's crucial role was defined in terms of how it could reconfigure the relationship between the particular and the universal. Art's critique of the dominant forces was always 'immanent' to its object, that is, it was not above but emerged from within its own circumstances.

The representation of art and politics in contemporary art history has not always maintained such rigorous and poetic standards. The dialectical relationship between art and politics that was defined by the Frankfurt School was often blurred by succeeding historians and critics, who emphasized the moral role of art or the inherently superior vision of the artist. Some of the most influential thinkers of the British left have defined the social role of the artist in the paradoxical terms of an outrider,¹³ witness to the

forgotten or buried history of the everyday,¹⁴ and moral guide in a restless and fragmented world.¹⁵ Art was seen as being capable of reminding us of the gaps between the promise of progress and the dystopic realities of modernity; of exposing the alienating effects of technological changes; of challenging the barriers which were imposed to separate social classes and segregate the private from the public; of expressing inner states that lacked representation in everyday language; of creating happenings in which we could experience feelings and relationships that had been excluded from 'normal' encounters.

The validity of these general claims has not been rendered obsolete by globalization. However, the conceptual framework for representing the context of art does require a radical overhaul. It is important to stress that the artistic strategies for developing interventions into the perception and construction of the social order were formed in conjunction with other political movements. This relationship between art and politics was often overlooked in the mainstream art historical discourse. This obscured the crucial process of reciprocity, and exaggerated either the autonomy of art or its dependence on politics. The relationship of art to the political is not confined to fixed polarities but formed in the dynamics of relational processes. A method for understanding art which stresses both its constitutive role in the cultural formations of modernity, and its relationship to the political, could offer a step out of the rigid polarities which dominated earlier debates. Art does not just express the stated meanings of a particular political movement, it participates in the construction of meaning. Similarly, the discourse on art does not follow like the shadow behind the body, but takes an active part in the production of meaning in contemporary culture. For the discourse on art to go beyond determinations of art's political message, or the proclamation of art's inherent autonomy, it is necessary, as I have argued, to examine how the placing of art in the everyday can redefine the boundaries of representation and experience.

The concept of the everyday could provide a new perspective for rethinking the relations between foreign and familiar, the fragment and the whole, kitsch and refinement, the mass produced and the unique object, which have been central to art practice from the outset of the avant garde. However, the limits to the concept of the everyday were also recognized by Jonathon Watkins, who curated the 1998 Sydney Biennale, under the title *Every Day*. The aim of this exhibition was twofold. First, to select art which was not steeped in academic references. Secondly, to display art which could collectively represent different notions of the everyday.¹⁶ Art works emerging from the local practices of Thailand were thus positioned alongside their contemporaries from France. This attempt to bypass the aesthetic categories which previously privileged Western cultural forms and artistic agents produced considerable confusion amongst critics. A common question that was repeatedly put to the curator was: 'How do you differentiate between an installation of smashed rubbish bins in the museum and a collection of smashed rubbish bins on the street?' For most critics the positioning of such works was not seen as being on a continuum of the readymade in the institution of art, but as a flawed attempt to situate art in the realm of popular culture.

The theme for the 11th Sydney Biennale was the notion of the 'everyday', which had its genesis in the idea that artists are increasingly exploring daily life as a source of ideas and inspiration. No argument with that. The main problem with Watkins's take on this otherwise hackneyed idea, however, was that it seemed to include just about everything from a handful of shipping containers in front of the Opera House to an empty room sporting the brazen wall-label 'Gritty dirt flicked from floorboard cracks, searching for the sea'...Everyday artwork in a museum or art gallery might provide an interesting comment on the state of

contemporary art, but located outdoors in the everyday it can easily become banal.¹⁷

Hence the more complex links that criss-cross popular culture and the conceptual representations of the everyday were overlooked. Another prominent example that addressed the art and politics of the everyday on a large scale was the 1999 Melbourne Biennial, *Signs of Life*, curated by Juliana Engberg.¹⁸ A great diversity of works from across the world was again assembled to demonstrate both the vitality of contemporary artists and their engagement with the issues of politics, ecology and identity. These connections were most striking in three particular works which were based on the medium of video and film. Approximately midway through the exhibition was Robert Gligorov's video presentation *Bobo's Legend*, 1998. This showed a close up of the artist's mouth opening and closing over a time-lapsed sequence. The mouth had been transformed as both nest and incubator for the hatching of a young chick. This form of 'nurturing' inspired both fascination and repulsion. I was overwhelmed by a feeling of tenderness towards this 'sign of life'. The political drama of the Balkans and the very delicacy of our environment were powerfully staged in this one scene. On the level above Gligorov were two filmic presentations by the Lithuanian artist Deimantas Narkevicius. Read together, these films presented the gap between the hopes that fuelled the Russian Revolution and the sense of despair that eventually undermined its legitimacy. The triumphalist spirit and heroic posturing which dominate the early film were contrasted by the stooped and languishing ambience of the latter. The Soviet regime, we conclude, not only failed to liberate the Lithuanian people but also destroyed the traditions and myths that were central to their identity. Narkevicius suggests that the Lithuanian people, who lived in the shadows of monumental statues of the Soviet man and woman, could not connect the grand narrative of the revolution with the personal stories of their daily lives. Along the same level was

another video presentation which contemplated the abyss of displacement, not in a temporal dimension but spatially. Andrea Lange's video *Refugee Talks*, 1998, documents the passion and pain of displaced people. Lange invited refugees from the Middle East who were detained in a Norwegian state 'reception centre' to sing before her static video camera. The power of this piece rested not in our understanding the meaning of the songs that were being performed, but in our registering the profound contrast between the tonalities of the refugee's voice and the tawdry texture of the sofas on which they sit; the beckoning turns of their hands and the fading surfaces of the walls behind them, the generosity of spirit so evident in their eyes and the meanness of the rooms in which they were confined.

In the accompanying catalogue no overall political agenda was outlined although many were noted, no form of sexual identity was privileged although dominant norms were questioned, and no framework for registering the traffic of cultural symbols was provided despite the inclusion of distant and hybrid signs. Having studiously avoided any direct correspondence between contemporary art practice and a particular theoretical or political position, Engberg preferred to display diversity. Each artist's work, she argued, could take us into a wide range of areas including the 'environment, psychology, biology, museology, architecture, physics and cartography', and that the encounter of all these individual investigations under the heading of *Signs of Life* could offer a 'lively cross-researched engagement with art and other disciplines which helps us understand our present intellectual, political and physical environment'.

The function that was defined for art at the end of the twentieth century, in Melbourne, was thus no less ambitious and as broad as the manifestos that were proclaimed by the early Russian avant-garde. Art was presented as a special optic through which all disciplines and areas in life could be 'interrogated'. Art was elevated from the humble and modest role of being one among

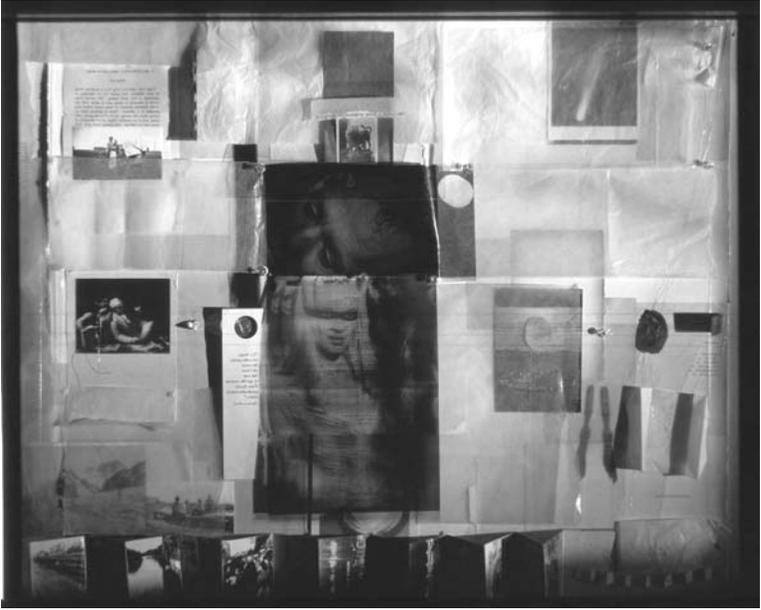
many responses to the modern world, to the practice which could integrate the insights of all others. From this 'transcendental' position, it was implied that artists had the power to humanize the alienating features of everyday life and offer hope for the future.

These bold claims appear to bypass rather than reconcile the place of art in the everyday. Before we can even begin to justify such an elevated role for art, there needs to be a consensus on the position of art in society. No such consensus exists. As author of the catalogue, Engberg describes the background and development of the artists included in the exhibition, but fails to illuminate the viewer on the criteria for inclusion. The absence of such criteria demonstrates a lacuna in curatorial practice that seeks to address the political aspects of art but bypasses the politics of art. To subsume politics under an appeal to the 'humanizing' qualities of art, obscures the specific issues of contestation that are at play with rival notions of place.

When do we check our pulse? Under normal circumstances we are too busy living. Only when the health of the body is in doubt. But can the body of art be compared to a human body? Is there a doctor who can distinguish the normal from the pathological? *Signs of Life* sought to supplement the loss of revolutionary spirit that fired the avant-garde at the end of the nineteenth century, by identifying the emergence of a consciousness that can embrace both the turbulent changes of globalization and a new more inclusive model of subjectivity. To presume that all this has already been internalized within the practice of contemporary art is a bold forward step into the next millennium, but also one that risks a return to the sentimental humanism that art discourse has struggled with throughout the twentieth century.

Making art by taking what is close at hand. Thinking about the biggest philosophical abstractions from the position of our most intimate experiences. Seeing change as being part of our choices rather than a product of external forces. These perspectives suggest that individual actions and social structures are linked together.

They are part of a process. In our actions we can also see that art, theory and politics are in a constant dialogue. One cannot proceed without the other. It would be absurd to believe that one discourse has already answered the questions of another. The relationship between art, politics and theory can never be of value if the integrity, in both the voices and silences of each position, is not acknowledged. Perhaps the concept of the everyday will now be seen not as the rejection of earlier debates on the context of art and the responsibility of the artist, but as the grounding of the meanings in art. Lyotard, in a last gasp attempt to resuscitate vanguardism, caught it beautifully when he described art as the 'flash that raises from the embers of the everyday'. It is paradoxical that the modernist faith in art's self-renewal persists in Lyotard's writing despite his general critique of the loss of faith in the other meta-narratives of modernity. From an idealist perspective, art may be a precursor of changes not yet fully felt, or a witness to states that are either excluded from the frame of hegemonic discourse, or still a faint murmuring in the heart of everyday life. However, an art which seeks to heighten our senses to the proximity of the marvellous, to find significance in commonplace signs, to connect one level of subjectivity with another, is a practice which not only fans the embers but also shares the fuel of theory and politics.



2. LYNDELL BROWN, CHARLES GREEN AND PATRICK POUND, 'PANORAMIC VIEW OF THE CITY OF SHADOWS', 2001.

5. TROMPE L'OEIL

UNDER THE SIGNS OF EVERYTHING

The starting point for critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and in 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. Therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory.

Antonio Gramsci

The most brilliant example of the trompe l'oeil did not have to wait for the invention of photography. Long before the trickeries of montage and the laboratory experiments with perspective, Zeuxis invited his rival Parrhasius to view his most recent painting. Parrhasius had already gained the reputation of being the master of illusion in the city-state of Athens. It was claimed that birds would descend to feed on his painted grapes. As Parrhasius approached to view Zeuxis's painting he reached out to lift the curtain, but the curtain was not there.

Zeuxis had not set out to fool mere birds. His painting of a fake curtain demonstrated, at a far higher level, the mutual reinforcement of expectation and illusion in the representation of a sign. In art, there is always a distance between the sign and the object; when our hand reaches out for the object of everyday life it can

only find a screen. The work of art is to take signs from everyday life in order to transform both the meaning of the sign in its everyday context, and the attendant processes of association. For centuries, the use of the *trompe l'oeil* has been a powerful example of the way art refers to signs from everyday life but also displaces the appearance of things. It can simulate the appearance of ordinary things and also point towards what Gombrich called 'an ensemble of possible states'.

The *trompe l'oeil* plays with the unstable oscillation between the projection of conventional associations and the perception of signs which seem out of place. We, like Parrhasius before us, see a curtain and project our hand to unveil the sign underneath, but then we realize that the curtain is not an object hiding other signs. This gap between the perception of a sign and the role of that sign, in the normal field of action, unsettles our expectations. When these relationships become loose and unmoored we can become a little lost. In such moments of displacement our baffled stare resembles the bemused countenance that foreigners display when they fail to see the connection between the surrounding street signs and the fold-up map in their hand.

The *trompe l'oeil* plays with this experience of estrangement, perhaps to remind us of our exile from the garden of paradise, or more tellingly, to show that the promise of revelation is never fulfilled. There are signs under signs *ad infinitum*. In the Renaissance, the *trompe l'oeil* took on more edifying duties. The representation of the human subject in still life painting was celebrated by either elevating the Doge of Venice onto celestial clouds, or encasing symbols of power by the side of Florentine noblemen. The *trompe l'oeil* extended the horizons and repertoire of allegory in painting. However, this technique of self-aggrandizement and symbolic association has now reached new levels of saturation. With the ability of most home computers to cut and paste images with the same ease as text, the fantasies of association—for instance, the depiction of me with Nelson Mandela, or me with

Naomi Campbell, or me with Mike Tyson, or me with Toni Morrison—can be extended *ad absurdum*.

Computers and the new camera technologies have not exposed the redundancy of the skills of painting but rather radically altered the grammar for reading an image. As our mode of perception has become dominated by visual technologies, this has produced a paradoxical relationship to images. They dominate our perceptions but we remain uncertain of their value. The traditional techniques for establishing the aura of reverence and authority have been displaced. We have become more skeptical over the truth content of photographic images. What are the boundaries of plausibility in an age of visual promiscuity? Who would be so naive to believe an unknown image, when image manipulation is literally child's play? Yet, how can there be an appreciation of the power of an image without the open expectation of belief in art?

The shift to the medium of photography, and the use of signs in the collaboration between the Melbourne-based artists Lyndell Brown, Charles Green and Patrick Pound was, in part, influenced by the shadow of disillusionment that has fallen over the public culture of painting and the ambivalent relationship between photography and the assemblage of 'facts' from everyday life. Their collaboration was an exploration of the source materials that document a movement between the discourses of art history, and a shuttling between the pages of social history.

Photography can exploit the enigmatic field of association that mediates facts with realities, especially when the photograph is composed of a multiplicity of other previously photographed images. In this collaboration, signs are placed by each other in order to establish links. These links provide thematic correspondences or forms of oblique repetition within the general scheme of mapping the artist's world. Figures are juxtaposed to activate an initial feeling of resemblance—Joseph Beuys and Gertrude Stein are, for instance, both represented in their celebrated states of contemplation. This juxtaposition echoes the cumulative effect of

countless art students pinning postcards and magazine cuttings on the walls of their studio or bedroom. The very images we work and dream with, these companions and inspirers, can, at times, assume identities which double over the original, revealing a more disturbing image that was lurking somewhere between the object on the wall and the fantasy that was formed in the mind.

The boundary between recognition and speculation also blurs in this collaboration. The artists have taken images from their world. The world that the artists draw from is already saturated with visual meaning and memory. Each image is a marker of significance, a fragment in a life narrative, which is exquisitely linked to other steps in that world. To the viewer, who is a stranger to the history of these lives, the images have an uncertain origin. As we have not shared the artist's journey, the trail of association will ricochet between our own points of reference and the imaginative connections that are elicited by the work.

When an exhibition is headed 'Towards a Theory of Everything', when it is composed of a complex assemblage of images taken from pamphlets, tickets, invitations, leaflets, wrapping paper, postcards, magazine covers and illustrated pages from books, encyclopedias and manuals—to what could it be referring? In the public culture of the artworld there is now both an awareness of the failure of the ideological models of generalization and a need to be more cautious over the way cultural and sexual boundaries are crossed. This has created a new kind of etiquette and also exposed a moral hesitancy. Few dare to speak other than in the language of specificity, particularity, fragmentation and difference. The expression of an ambition to embrace and project a vision of totality is almost laughable. The problem is deeper than the so-called 'shackles of political correctness'. Universalism is in exile and the artists in this collaboration know the punishment for those seeking the meaning of the whole. They proceed regardless, neither intimidated nor in despair. For surely they must start from the conviction that a theory of everything is still possible, even if they

also know in advance that it is impossible. These are not the contradictions of fools but the tensions that drive creativity, the friction from which profound connections emerge. The artists are heading towards a theory of everything but constantly drawing from and returning to their own position. The collaboration is an excavation of their past in order to argue with possible futures. It desires the place of theory but refuses the closed and detached world of abstraction. It demands a more vigilant and strategic sense of the whole.

In this collaboration the autobiographical integration between the theoretical and the empirical is a distant promise. The flow of the world is not deduced from the movements of one person. Nor do the historical and cultural ensembles that the artists construct yield a coherent model. There is no ordering of the material to produce a single hypothesis. They do state, however, that their assemblage of images—which under a conventional classification system would be slotted under the headings of, say, either ephemeral or monumental, folkloric or avant-garde art—is organized according to the principles of ‘list structures’. Charles Green has found a surprising parallel between their collaborative practice and the method for relating signs and objects in minimal art. He notes that ‘list structures’ is the method for identifying the properties that are necessary to rebuild an object. It is an examination of urban archaeology, historical memory and the discourses of art, which does not search for the hidden inner logic but scrutinizes the visibility of ‘surface events’.

Brown, Green and Pound are artists who have accumulated a vast archive of visual images. Through their selection and assemblage of various signs they are not attempting to rebuild an object; rather, they are attempting to define their position in their local community and map their journeys through the global artworld. They refuse to see a binary opposition between the two, but their assemblages are bursting with the competing pressures of silence and protestation, outright dismissal and selective

admission, recognition and rejection, which frame any examination of the centre from the perspective of the periphery.

From the archive of their everyday lives and from the remnants of their own sojourns we are presented with the effect of their own practice of mapping. We do not stand before a map, or an archive in the conventional sense, because if we did we could legitimately ask for the references, the grid, the rules of ordering, so that we could plot our own position in relation to the system we are confronting, or determine the criteria for inclusion and exclusion, why some objects are given the value of being kept and others are disposed of. Thus for all its complexity and scale this work is private and incomplete. It is as endless and as Sisyphean as life itself. The boundaries are imposed not to distinguish a unique form, but to show that the assemblage of the content is not random and infinite. To make artwork that performs the work of memory and mapping is a way of revealing the anxieties of history and place. The technique may point towards everything or promise universality but it always delivers a very local fixation; it is, in the end, to paraphrase the postcolonial critic Gayatri Spivak, an 'itinerary of desire'.

If their departure from painting was predicated on a growing disillusionment with the public culture of critical interpretation—that is, the ease with which a painting could be reduced to mere decoration, and the difficulty of understanding in historical terms the allegorical structures of the signs within painting—then their turn to photography as a means for documenting deep cultural anxieties and revealing new mnemonic and cartographic structures is similarly vulnerable. Appropriations and blasé responses are not confined to painting. Both the enigma and the shock of photography have been diffused by the very proliferation of visual images in contemporary society; however, our ability to identify, distinguish, connect and then narrate, has not expanded in proportion with the sheer volume of images to which we are exposed.

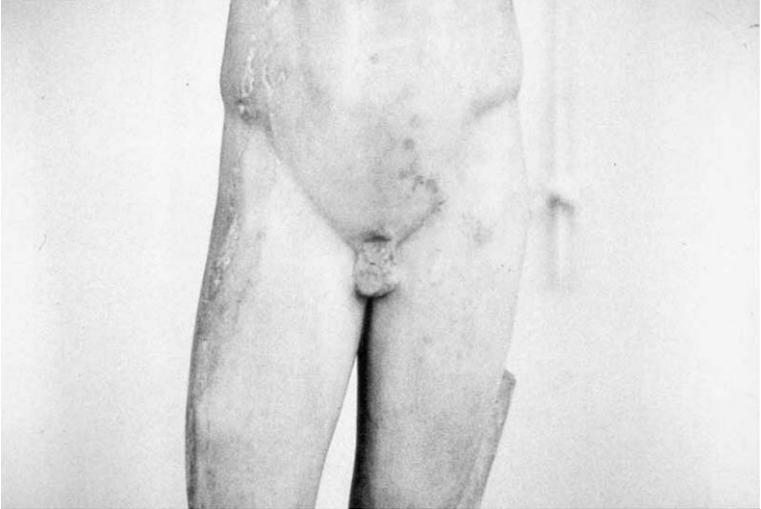
The conundrum over the ability to judge the meaning of an

image returns us to the ancient confusion of the *trompe l'oeil*. The work of the *trompe l'oeil* in art is to lead perception towards one direction only to displace the attention that follows. Today the confusion does not occur because one image can deceive our senses, but rather in the multiplicity of images that overwhelm the senses. The density and diversity of images and text within these assemblages can, in the first instance, overwhelm the possibilities of interpretation. The pages have been placed on the wall in a specific order. The images have been precisely juxtaposed. But in what order are they meant to be read or viewed? How could we make meaning of our position in this world? We could start with everything. To look at the work, all at once, making heroic non-sequential leaps, finding echoes and mirrors for our own voices and visage, or perhaps even better, reminders of the moments when the delicate forms of our life narrative were so intimately entwined with another that it became historical.

PART II

THE ELASTIC METAPHOR

CULTURAL IDENTITY, PLACE AND
PHOTOGRAPHY



3. EUGENIA RASKOPOULOS, 'WITHOUT VOICE', 1998.

6. CAMERA CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION

The questions ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Where do I belong?’ have assumed, in modern times, an unparalleled degree of urgency and complexity. Never before has the self been the site of such intense cultivation and the place of origin such a determining force in our destiny. Psychoanalysis and passports were introduced at almost the same time. To break out of the past and to venture across to new territories has been a dominant drive in modernity. However, what also haunted this expansionist epoch was the fear of the eternal return (that the escape would prove illusory). The concepts of identity and culture were also bound in this ambivalent relationship between continuity and rupture.

Like many migrants of the twentieth century, my parents lived with the photographs of their friends, parents and homes in the way that religious people live with icons. Photographs are like mobile homes or like the *filakto*, the miniature icons that protected those who journeyed to unknown shores. In the house of my childhood, photos were at first stored in shoe-boxes. We shared our home with other migrants. To put our beloved on display would be a kind of blasphemy, or at least would lead to some form of harm or sorrow. There were already too many memories for a single house to bear, and they were all raw. When we could afford to live on our own and bought a television the

photos came out of the boxes and appeared on top.

Photography has been a powerful medium for representing identity. Since at least the time of Walter Benjamin's celebrated essays in *Illuminations*, the story of identity and photography has been understood as a love-hate affair. With its explosive speed, as Benjamin noted, photography opens new horizons and directs us to details that our optical attention would otherwise miss:

The camera intervenes with the resources of its lowerings and lifting, its interruptions and isolations, its extensions and accelerations, its enlargements and reductions. The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses.

If the camera is to be seen as an extension of the eye, then it is important to stress that photography is never the mere reflection of what is 'out there'. As Jean-Luc Godard said, 'a photograph is not a reflection of reality, it is the reality of that reflection.' The photographic image, in even the highest forms of fidelity and resolution, is not an objective record but a part of our symbolic language for modelling the visual. This language is part of the means by which we make sense of 'who we are' and 'how we interpret the world'.

Photography is often seen as a tool, a new technology for representing predefined identities and discrete realities, as if these were separate from each other. Yet they are deeply connected. Photography has changed the way we understand and represent cultural identity, and these changes in self-image have also transformed the way we relate to and utilize the visual culture of contemporary life. Our experiences of simultaneity, the role of distanciation and interpenetration, the tension between fragmentation and unity, the new perspectivism and processes of identification would be inconceivable without the practice of photography.

The ubiquity of the camera is undeniable. From the closed circuit surveillance of inner city areas, to the scanning of an unborn baby, almost every aspect of modern life is presented before the scrutiny of the camera. In media studies the majority of texts that have surveyed the influence of the camera on modern culture have focused almost exclusively on how either the forming of opinions are manipulated, or the gathering of information is aided, but they have almost always failed to examine the way perceptions are remodelled and the very language of representation is restructured. The mechanics of the camera and the practice of photography may tell us more about the contemporary form of knowledge and our current conceptions of identity than they capture the empirical realities that are otherwise 'out there'. Benjamin was right when he stressed that the power of the camera was more directed to the transformations of our consciousness than the inherent technical utility for producing images. The camera is not a neutral instrument: it does not simply distort or repress values and ideas which are often presumed to exist like *a priori* categories, but is involved in the process of constituting their precise form. The camera has not only led to the proliferation of positive or negative images, it has been implicated in the reconstruction of our value system. It is from this perspective that we need to accept Susan Sontag's observation that 'only with effort can the camera be forced to lie.'

In modern culture the relationship between identity and the image has reached such an extreme level of dependency that we could almost rephrase the Cartesian equation as: 'I photograph therefore I exist.' Identity is never formed prior to its representation, and today the dominant form of representation is the visual. The two are apprehended in a dialectical relationship; they are mutually transformed as the subject of identity is translated into the object of photography, and then in turn, the subject becomes conscious of his or her identity through the participation and response in this process of imaging. This translational process goes in both directions. The ordering of self and other through photography is not

marshalled singularly for the benefit of the camera. When it has appeared that this is the case, as in the long history of objectification, from the visual ethnographies of colonialism to your passport photos, this says more of the ideological intent of that regulatory regime than the intrinsic syntax of the technology.

In *Another Way of Telling*, John Berger noticed that ‘positivism and the camera and sociology grew up together.’ For him, photography is complicit with the broader practices of abstracting and commodifying social relations, of ripping meaning out of specific contexts, of homogenizing the value of cultural experiences. Everything can be rendered flat and placeless in photography. Yet he also sees photography as the means by which memory is revitalized and narrative redeemed. ‘It is because the photographs carry no certain meaning in themselves, because they are like images in the memory of a total stranger, that they lend themselves to any use.’ Thus the compulsion before a photograph is to excavate the surrounding associations and to use it as a catalyst in what Berger calls the ‘radial energy’ of consciousness. This is the juncture at which the private photograph, with its the unique meaning, meets the public status of an icon, that is, an image that is divested of any specific reference to the past but is expressive of the general condition of living.

This chapter weaves together a theoretical outline of the concept of cultural identity with responses to the practice of contemporary photographers who have explored the complex relationship between place and identity. It emerged from a series of correspondences with artists about the difficulty of finding a place to speak from, but also one that speaks to and of you. How wonderful it would be to be in a place where your name, identity and address appear as one. These days who can say, with clarity and without interference: ‘I am from here!’ Or declare with even greater strength: ‘Here is where I am from!’ No sooner is such a signal emitted than another voice, or another transmitter, cuts into the message and complicates the signs of being and belonging. The

idea of a speaking place, a place from which one can speak, is closely linked to the knowledge of culture.

During the period of early modernity the term 'culture' was either reserved for aesthetic and philosophical discourses that sought to elevate the subject above their banal existence, or projected onto the exotic practices of pre-modern societies. Culture had a split identity: it was restricted to either the exalted and refined expressions of 'high' society in the metropolitan centres, or the pre-modern traditions and primitive practices of the peripheries. On both sides of the divide was the view that, in modernity, culture was beyond the sphere of everyday life.

Since its invention, photography has blurred the boundary between high culture and popular culture. At first, it offered a powerful mirror to capture the 'spirit of everyday life'. This 'mirror' was used to hold our attention, offer views of distant places and reveal the details that we would otherwise pass by without notice. As the camera conveys a scene, whether it is composed of people, buildings or nature, it gives us the opportunity to reflect. This reflection is often seen as a nostalgic and melancholic act. Indeed there is no doubt that photography is a trigger for memory and association, but not every photograph that can produce this effect is personal. The intriguing feature of looking at other people's photographs and photographs of other people is the experience of discovering something about oneself.

In the early period of modernity there was a binary division of identities. To be modern was not to be part of any particular culture, because the cultural parameters of modernity were defined in terms of universals. Cultural identity was thus reserved for those who were outside of the metropolitan zones of modernity; it represented the identities of people who were locked into traditional and primitive practices. The space of cultural identity was thus constructed as the opposite of modern identity. It was closed and conservative. Cultural identity was seen as the embodiment of tradition that had been developed within a specific place and over

a long period of time. Cultural identity was not linked to the way an individual or a community could make sense of the world, in all its messy totality, but rather was restricted to a specific set of coherent and distinctly defined practices for repeating the past. The preservation of the past became the duty and objective of cultural identity.

To be modern, in contrast, was to be part of the flows and ruptures of history. Modern identity was not rooted in a particular place, nor exclusively linked to fixed practices. Fashions changed, tastes were fickle, conformity and blind belief were unacceptable, mobility was the sign of success, and change was adored for its own sake. Marx's phrase from *The Communist Manifesto*, 'all that is solid melts into air', captured the zeitgeist of early modernity. After the progressive march of modernity had gained momentum it was assumed that the idea of cultural identity would be superseded. If some remnants of the past hung on, these were relegated to being part of a transitional phase, or seen as a mere display of sentiment and nostalgia for the lost home. Modernity picked up the idea of home, broke its links to the past, and irrevocably situated it in the inaccessible horizons of the future. Home was no longer something you returned to, but rather a place you could never quite reach. Settling down was akin to giving up and pulling out of the modern quest. In this restless sensibility and homeless epoch there was no place for cultural identity.

The dominant ideologies of early modernity, both liberalism and Marxism, were premised on the assumption that particular cultural attachments would be displaced by universal values and identities. Local identities and exclusive forms of ethnicity would disappear under the force of modernity. According to these perspectives, irrational and traditional identities would be replaced by an enlightened and universal identity. Modernity never delivered such promises. If anything, the ruptures and migrations of this period have revealed the hollowness that lurked within such triumphalist discourses. The displacements

and transformations associated with globalization have forced us to rethink the status of cultural identity.

Contemporary photographers have also challenged the absolutist claims of modernity. Their photographs reveal more complex traces and connections between the past and present, self and other, near and far. For instance, the photography of Helene Black probes at the boundaries of time, place and identity that operate in conventional portraits. Black uses photography to pose the question of 'who am I?', not only in historical terms but also in relation to the 'in-between spaces' of cultural identity. This exploration involves a double act, both discovering and inventing the self. In one sense there is an archaeological quest for a past self. She must find her sources. This level of excavation could be seen as a form of a family tree where lines of resemblance and influence are traced. But maybe the word influence is too strong here. The closer you examine the connections the more you can also see differences, or what could be called the degree to which the self was invented. Her photographs include images of forebears, and their ghostly presence suggests that they were a strong part of her life, they put pressure on her in one way or another, they provided directions or opportunities, or that they enabled certain steps to be found. However, this influence is not like an external force that exerts itself on an object whose shape or trajectory is then inevitably altered. There is no sense of a hierarchy or a homage to the figures above and outside of her identity. A softer and more fluid movement exerts itself between the personal and the cultural. Such a perspective shows that the construction of the self is almost cinematic. The self becomes an image that can be manipulated and invented. It is reinvented as one image is morphed with another to create a third, and previously unseen self. While the archaeologist would search to discover the missing self, the one that we knew was buried in the deep and not visible on the surfaces of everyday life, the cinematographer is driven to construct another identity based on the fragments that already exist. Between these two

modes of discovery and invention we see a form of identity that oscillates between presence and absence on the spectrum of experience.

Black's attention to the gaps and in-between spaces of cultural identity can be explained by the specific historical and political circumstances of her own biography. Black lives in Cyprus. She is painfully aware of its division in relation to her life. The concept of the border is not just abstract; it is a political fact of everyday life. It appears at irregular points as she traverses the divided city of Nicosia. At some points the dimensions of the border are as narrow as the width of the mortar between two walls, in other places it may be as wide as the metres of weed-filled no-man's land that is patrolled by nervous sentries. At all points the border is also the place where beginnings and endings overlap. It is never a neutral or empty space. In the poem by Louis Perentos, there is testament to the bristling energy and pressure of the border:

We say we have houses and they don't belong to us
 we say we have children and they don't belong to us
 we say we have history and it doesn't belong to us
 we say we have a country and it doesn't belong to us
 we say we have and we have nothing
 apart from our unbearable loneliness

Black's photography could be seen as a document for a divided country and a testament to her own history of migration. However, to focus exclusively on these personal and political details would also risk losing sight of the more general and philosophical questions on identity. The power of Black's photography is not confined to its location in the personal but in its ability to provoke broader reflections over the questions of absence and presence. This questioning over the gaps in identity and the places that 'don't belong to us' can also provide a metaphor for the condition of other people's identities.

The necessity for a cultural identity is not a problem that only migrants carry with them, nor is it the burden that shackles backward people to the past. Cultural identity has been configured in these limited and patronizing terms partly because it was originally articulated within sociological and anthropological paradigms, which highlighted the exploited and melancholic conditions of migrants and savages, and tended to suggest that their cultural identity was disfigured by the fatal contact with modernity. Cultural identity was thus defined *for others*, those who either arrived belatedly, or had been bypassed by the dynamics of modern history. This in turn allowed those who found themselves in the centres of modernity to turn a blind eye to their own cultural identity. As their own sense of identity was inextricably linked to the modern dynamic of change and progress, they could assume that their cultural identity was subsumed by the gestures of being modern. During spasmodic moments, when the modern sensibility was able to partially acknowledge its own crisis, the cultural identity of the other was celebrated, but again only according to the binary logic of a counter-position, one which could appropriate the mythical integrity of the primitive in order to highlight the material decadence and spiritual poverty of modernity. As Hal Foster observed, 'the primitive is a modern problem, a crisis in cultural identity.'¹

The recognition that the primitive did not belong in a space outside of the modern, and that this opposition was itself symptomatic of a deeper crisis in cultural identity, was enabled by a rethinking of the relationship between culture and identity. There was a direct challenge to the prevailing view in the early modernist literature, and in the social sciences more generally, which had externalized the relationship between identity formation and cultural development. It presupposed that, at first, individuals had little choice in determining what sort of culture surrounds and constructs their everyday life. Culture was defined as a given which is imposed upon the self: that is, as an entity which always

precedes and extends beyond the identity of an individual. However, in recent years the debates on cultural identity have both reversed and exploded this relationship. The critique of the self in both philosophical and psychoanalytic discourses has challenged the fundamental categories of Western metaphysics. The recent feminist and postcolonial perspectives have also assumed an influential role in re-defining the relationship between subjectivity and what Stuart Hall calls the ‘politics of representation’.

The notions of a unified identity and a discrete culture have now undergone strenuous critiques and new perspectives have emerged which argue in favour of anti-essentialist views of cultural formation and performative constructions of agency. Identity, it is now argued, begins as it constructs a shape out of its cultural surroundings, and a culture only takes form through the process of identification and articulation. Concepts like the ‘location of culture’ and the ‘possession of identity’ became problematical. Both were scrutinized from the perspective of a more radical form of historicization, and reconfigured within frameworks that sought to break out of the binary codes of Western metaphysics. The decisive break with the eurocentric and binary views of culture did not occur until the crisis of modernism was compounded by the emergent cultural politics of decolonization and globalization. As Stuart Hall argues, the issues of cultural identity have assumed a significance of global dimensions:

The re-emergence of questions of ethnicity, of nationalism—the obduracy, the dangers and the pleasures of the rediscovery of identity in the modern world, inside and outside of Europe—places the question of cultural identity at the very center of the contemporary political agenda.²

Through this turbulent epoch, the distinctions between the insider and the outsider, the citizen and the stranger, have been violently unsettled. Populations and cultures have been on the move and the

idea of the homeland bitterly contested. In this context, the debates about cultural identity have taken on a prominent role. Once seen from the perspective of rupture and displacement, the concepts of culture and identity could no longer be represented as being exclusively rooted in one location, or assuming that they could, that authenticity was abandoned at the point of departure. Though migrants and displaced peoples around the world often invoked their cultural identity in terms of the name of their place of origin and sought to emphasize the continuity with the past, they were also compelled to negotiate the differences between locations and forms of subjectivity.

This process of cross-cultural negotiation was at first considered to be a 'problem' that only migrants would have to resolve. It was assumed that, with time and the inevitable gravity of acculturation, these 'problems' would fade. However, what was once a marginal concern within debates about the sociology of migration and the institutional politics of migrant welfare, has now become one of the central concerns of modern culture. Cultural identity showed unexpected forms of resilience: it resisted acculturation and sharpened the crisis in the dominant discourses of the self within the West. Under this pressure the concepts of culture and identity required a radical overhaul. It became necessary to see how cultures are constituted across differences, rather than being consolidated within closed traditions, and how identity was always constructed through an unending play and oscillation within the polarities of past and present, the self and other. There was, consequently, a revision of the linear view of cultural progress, which had predicted that pre-modern forms of cultural identity would be successively superseded.

Once the idea of culture was extended to incorporate the dynamic exchange between the social context and the forms of knowledge in everyday life, and the conception of identity was liberated from the essentialist categories of authentic inner being, then the internal and external relationships which construct a

cultural identity could begin to be understood in ways that did not fix the categories of identification and belonging within exclusivist paradigms. As the debates on modern subjectivity began to move out of *a priori* notions of origin and destiny, culture was also no longer either confined to a closed space, or restricted to the repetition of a distinct set of practices that distinguished one locale from another. Culture was not just the organization of objects and rituals which defined a sense of place, but also an optic, a way of seeing and making sense of the world.

7. THE CONSTITUTION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

The properties of cultural identity are paradoxical and elusive. The question of identity takes its most delicate and barbed form when a sense of belonging is in doubt. When there is uncertainty as to where to locate the self in relation to the place, taste and traditions of others, then the question of identity appears in its most precarious form. The determination of a cultural identity is always coterminous with the practice of defining a position in the world and is interconnected with the way we recognize our relation to others. Displacement is always double: stability is lost in relation to both one's place in the world and one's sense of self as an integrated subject.¹ Cultural identity exists through a process of differentiation. Its form is shaped as much by what it excludes as that which it includes. While politicians summon the term 'cultural identity' to connote a stable and clear sense of self, the constitution of cultural identity is inexorably dependent upon the fluid and unstable practices of incorporation. There is a fundamental contradiction between the dominant political discourses, which represent cultural identity in terms of overarching national categories, and place emphasis on the qualities of exclusivity and uniqueness, and the recent theoretical understanding which stresses a dynamic practice of incorporation which defies the principle that identity can be based on fixed and pure categories.

Cultural identity in the political discourse is a bounded concept, reflecting back the territorial integrity and mythical self-image of the unified nation state. This effectively reduces cultural identity from a dynamic process to an object that can only be either defended or preserved.

Cultural identity cannot exist as a petrified emblem, or as an icon suspended in a time-frame of its own. It is a living process. It exists in the basic practice of internalization and exchange, which is so fundamental to social relationships that it is safe to say that cultural identity is a universal. Always in dispute are the particular forms of cultural identity and its given status. While the question of identity cuts across the debates on modernity and its articulation has changed, Zygmunt Bauman is surely right to remind us that:

Indeed, if the *modern* ‘problem of identity’ was how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the *post-modern* ‘problem of identity’ is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open.²

There are no standards against which a cultural identity can be measured, nor is there an assured position of authenticity from which other forms can be judged. Yet the debates on cultural identity are replete with judgements that condemn others as being in a state of either denial or exaggeration. These responses are part of the manoeuvres for positioning in the ‘politics of representation’, whereby it appears that some forms of cultural identity are so secure that they have the luxury of taking their own name for granted, while others consider their own integrity to be at risk whenever an external force seeks to cross its border. The retreat into a form of ethnic absolutism is not a strategy that is confined to minority communities. While minorities may articulate their own identity by means of a rigid identification with their culture of origin, dominant communities have attacked difference in order to bolster the

project of nation building. Both the oblivious and vigilant forms of cultural identity tend to presume that security is based on the durability and consistency of their symbols and practices.

Cultural identity is not a coherent and consistent body of symbols, ideas and practices. It is more like what Gramsci called the 'strangely composite' formation of common sense,³ comprising symbols which are both ancient and modern, ideas that are both traditional and novel, and practices which are securely embedded in a known past as well as those contemporary ones whose paths are barely mapped. This combination cannot be represented purely in terms of juxtaposition. It is not simply the positioning of the past hard up against the present, the old with the new, but also the reconfiguring of both.

Imagining cultural identity in the form of a mosaic can be very misleading, for this image exaggerates the distinctiveness of its components and overlooks the more dynamic play at the internal and external borders of identity. The energy of cultural identity, its potential for renewal, its subtle rhythms of extension, are most potent and focused when there is a dual coding of past and present, foreign and familiar, known and unknown. Cultural identity is a fragmentary, disjointed and contradictory phenomenon that is experienced as if it were a unified and stable formation, precisely because the boundaries between the constituent symbols, ideas and practices constantly oscillate through the process of interaction. The experience of cultural identity is paradoxical. It exists in a state of exquisite vibrancy, at the same time that it is also experienced as if it were part of a continuous historical process. It is when the old is experienced within the contours of the new, and vice versa, that cultural identity can claim a pernicious as well as an enlightening purchase on contemporaneity. Cultural identity is not just the preservation of the past, but the future-oriented process of claiming a space within the present and ultimately a projection of how a life should be lived. Stuart Hall has captured this double dynamic when he notes that:

No cultural identity is produced out of thin air. It is produced out of those historical experiences, those cultural traditions, those lost and marginal languages, those marginalized experiences, those peoples and histories which remain unwritten. Those are the specific roots of identity. On the other hand, identity itself is not the rediscovery of them, but what they as cultural resources allow a people to produce. Identity is not in the past to be found, but in the future to be constructed.⁴

Following this, it could be stated that cultural identity is the process by which the conceptions and categories are articulated in everyday consciousness. It is not just a static and closed system of knowledge but the active means by which meanings are shaped and transformed. The vitality of cultural identity is thus experienced in the simultaneity of being both vividly spontaneous and deeply historical.

The recent debates on cultural identity have the potential to renew the difficult and unresolved questions of agency in social theory. Aided by the feminist scholarship of Judith Butler and Lois McNay, Hall has already re-examined the Althusserian and Foucauldian legacy on agency and crossed this with a re-reading of the Freudian and Lacanian work on identification.⁵ The agency of cultural identity is, according to Hall, not an essence but a positioning across 'the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourses of history and culture'.⁶ The subject that is constituted within this complex network of relationships will invariably have a plurality of identities. Contradictory elements cannot be simply dismissed as an expression of false consciousness, or judged as a manifestation of an underdeveloped cultural formation. For it is from *within* these contradictions and fragmentary compositions that cultural identity draws its catalytic dynamism. Recognition and affirmation are not dependent on a unified and integrated image, even when the public

discourse that promotes a specific cultural identity is loudly projecting the existence of such ideological projections of purity and exclusivity.

The cult of purity and permanence which is central to the classical conception of beauty was the subject in a body of work by Eugenia Raskopoulos, entitled *with(out) voice* (1998). This work brings together two themes which are central to Raskopoulos's practice: the significance of Greekness, and the measure of a migrant's life. It is based on a series of photographs taken at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens, Greece, and on some very personal photographs of the artist's grandmother—a woman who fled her village in northern Greece during the civil war, found refuge in the communist state of Czechoslovakia, briefly returned to Greece, and then migrated to Australia.

The ten photographs include five images of different *kouroi*, classical sculptures of idealized youth, and five images of the face of the artist's grandmother. All the *kouroi* images concentrate on the abdominal region, between the navel and the knees, with the genitals in centre. The grandmother's face is also not fully displayed, but rather each image is a close-up of her tightly closed lips. Raskopoulos has used the technique of iris printing to create an effect of tenderness. In particular, the *kouroi* have a tactile quality that I have not seen before in any other reproduction. This process of high resolution ink-jet printing onto matt paper gives a textural feeling which complements the mottled discoloration of the marble on the original sculptures. The way the ink absorbs into the paper, and the rendering of greys from light to dark between background and foreground, highlights both the corrosive and edifying traces that, through time, have been deposited on the marble. These images, although only depicting mere fragments of the original sculptures, still seem to echo their moving sense of balance and dignity. Even with the evidence of damage on the clenched hands, which were always at the sides, and the mutilated genitals, that are normally neatly nestling between the striding

thighs, the symmetry and poise of these sculptures is unmistakable. The *kouros* is commonly associated with being the standard-bearer of Classical beauty, sometimes even representing the god Apollo. However, many *kouroi* stood as attendants to other gods, or as memorials over the graves of renowned warriors and noble citizens.

It is the memorializing role of the *kouros* that provides the counterpoint to the five images of the artist's grandmother. These black-and-white close-ups of the mouth are like maps to a silent history. Around the lips countless lines and wrinkles have defined the unique contours of her face. With age the surface of the skin has folded and creased. These marks are like secret narratives that display the outline of a journey but not its meaning. Before them youth stands in wonder. The lines are like roads that cut across an uninhabited landscape. We can imagine that life surrounds and teems from these boundaries, but we cannot read the signs. The lips remain closed, their softness indistinguishable from the well-weathered skin. As if a little stunned by this topography, the camera loses its focus as the face recedes. Unlike the *kouroi*, the mouth was shot with a macro lens. The sharpness and depth is not only testament to an ageing process, but also to an identity that never found a public voice. The woman's cultural identity was never recognized in the public discourse of the dominant culture. Raskopoulos's close-ups of her grandmother's face are also an act of protest against the city that has no memory of this body. The grandmother, a central figure in the house, the woman who has lived at the most intense edges, of the most extreme century, is left without a voice in civic life. A photograph cannot give voice to those who have been silenced but it can provide a memorial.

By staging the contrast between the dappled sculptural surface of the *kouroi* and the close-ups of the crossroads that are traced on her grandmother's face, Raskopoulos not only highlights the extremes of age and beauty, but also finds a connection between a very personal image and the monuments that are conventionally

used to represent purity and exclusivity. The *kouroi* become attendants to the nobility of the grandmother. The combination of the classical and the contemporary suggests that the ideals of culture are not only evident on the pedestals of classical art, but also found in the photographs of wrinkled experience.

8. CULTURES ON THE MOVE AND THE CHANGING SELF

It is crucial to note that cultural identity is in a constant state of regeneration. Its dynamic for change is a complex process of internalization and supplementation. The models for explaining this process have taken a subtle shift. Renewal was often understood as a form of differentiation whereby the relationship between the old and the new was experienced in such a way that the new enhances a quality that was latent in the old. This process of internalizing difference, by relating it to what has already existed within the boundaries of the cultural identity, has the effect of dissolving the contradiction between the inside and the outside, the old and the new. The subordination of one element to another thus ensured a sense of continuity where there was otherwise a rupture or clash between opposing planes. The modernist strategies of incorporation, or what has been more critically referred to as the 'cannibalizing of the other', has been understood as operating according to an 'economy of the same': difference is introduced into a body but only to confirm and bolster its own priorities.

More recently there have been attempts to explain the extensions to, and transformations of, cultural identity in terms of the way incommensurable elements are fastened together. Where a cultural identity is compelled to fulfil a need which has no historical reference point, this does not imply that (since there was no

such prior calling or similar resonance within that identity) it will simply bypass or exclude that need; rather it seeks to incorporate the new forms of subjectivity through supplementation. Discordant pieces are added on and these disjointed supplements can have the effect of disrupting the conventional order and realigning the priorities of the dominant self-image. However, the supplement may be granted a form of existence without a direct acknowledgement that it marks a rupture to the structure of the whole. While this appendage may have a precarious status it is nevertheless a vital feature in the self-preservation of all cultural identities. In a multicultural context, when cultural identities are not easily translatable according to their own terms, the dynamic role of difference takes on a crucial responsibility in expanding the framework of identification and understanding. As Peter Caws argues, cultural identity is never defined from a singular and internally consistent source.

The enlargement of individual horizons is one of the characteristics of multicultural identity. What is found beyond the old limited horizon may appear to be in conflict with what lies within it; cultures may be, as is sometimes said (borrowing an image, none too helpfully, from Greek mathematics) 'incommensurable'. But this need not be an occasion for despair since incommensurables can be comfortably accommodated in lifeworlds not dedicated to monocultural ideas of completeness and consistency. It is hard to resist quoting Whitman here, clichéd as the passage may have become: 'I contradict myself: very well, I contradict myself. I am large, I contain multitudes.'¹

A more subtle reading of cultural identity would not seek to convert the stigma of difference into a badge of pride, or compensate for the historical projections of lack with a counter-claim of cultural surplus, but would aim to subvert the very code which can only create identification through binary oppositions. Drawing

from Fanon's statement that the 'colonial subject is always overdetermined from without', Homi Bhabha argues that alienation is positioned in all the configurations of identity. Identity is no more, but no less, than a constant process of negotiation between image and fantasy, in which there is no pre-alienated self which can be redeemed, but rather the 'Otherness of the Self' is what is 'inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity'.² The condition of the colonial subject in Bhabha's writing explicitly opens up the splitting within the processual forms of imaging an identity. In an early essay he attacked the conception of identity which presupposed the prior essence of the ego:

The postmodern perspective insists that the question of identity can never be seen 'beyond representation', as a psychological problem of personality or even an ethical problem of personhood... We are no longer confronted with an ontological problem of being but with a discursive strategy of the 'moment' of interrogation; a moment in which the demand for identification becomes primarily, a response to other questions of signification and desire, culture and politics ... it is the priority (and Play) of the signifier that reveals the Third Space of absence or lack or doubling (not depth) which is the very principle of discourse.³

In Bhabha's later essay on the formation of national identity, he has gone even further in deconstructing the logic which confined the sign of otherness to the position of the margin. By pushing the question of identification to the point where all subject conditions are revealed to be split and partial, he reveals a process which constitutes the knowledge of the self as always dependent on the other. There is never a singular form of cultural identity which acquires the benchmark status of stability and unity against which others can be judged. The significance of this deconstructive reading of the narrative of subject formation is not only evident in the ways it heralds the existence of

those forms of cultural identity which were previously ignored and marginalized by the dominant discourse, but also in the aim to expose the logic which both authorizes a hierarchic construction of cultural identities and blurs the constitution of the self through a process of interdependency with and splitting from the other.

Once the liminality of the nation state is established, and its signifying difference is turned from the boundary 'outside' to its finitude 'within', the threat of cultural difference is no longer a problem of 'other' people. It becomes a question of otherness of the people-as-one.⁴

By situating cultural identity in the modern nation as the sign of the irreducibility of difference, Bhabha is thus not just pointing to the range in the pluralist national self-image, but also highlighting the process through which all forms of identification occur. Phrases like 'the moment of liminality', 'the disjunctive breaks of difference', 'the ruptures of the in-between space', are all expressive of his attempt to reconceptualize temporal and spatial frameworks of identification. These phrases seek to heighten attention to both those symbols whose meaning is not bound to either the transferal of fixed values along correspondent tracks, or those formations which are never more than the summation of their constitutive references. These forms of identity, which Bhabha is referring to, are always incomplete and mixed. The condition of their emergence exceeds the boundaries of their anticipation, and their naming appears belated and partial form. Defining such identities according to the logic of the supplement is not, for Bhabha, a despairing moment, but the precise point upon which a new politics of negotiation and inclusion can be initiated. It marks a way of acknowledging the sign of difference without repeating the modernist economy of the same. The cultural effect of this interruptive presence or disjunctive voice is to acknowledge that the presence of the other always occurs within the terms of reference

of the dominant discourse, but that it does not seek to be confined to mirroring back an alternate space. The identity that emerges from this position is one which resists the demands of solidarity and extension according to the logic of the same, rather it inscribes a presence out of the conjunctural modality which oscillates between the monumental position of authority and the equivocal moment of emergence. This perplexing state is best described by Bhabha in the form of questions:

How does one encounter the past as an anteriority that continually introduces an otherness or alterity into the present? How does one then narrate the present as a form of contemporaneity that is neither punctual nor synchronous? In what historical time do such configurations of cultural difference assume forms of cultural and political authority?⁵

The form of identification that Bhabha is referring to is not dependent on the principles of common origin, shared history or a solidarity that is confined to those of the 'one blood'. Similarly, the semantic field of identification extends beyond the boundaries of shared characteristics. What Bhabha is referring to, and it is a theme which is developed in a later essay by Stuart Hall, is the conditional and contingent process of articulation. Identification is a process which is always incomplete and excessive.⁶ Both Bhabha and Hall note that identification always operates *across* differences. Identity is never fully constituted nor utterly lost. By drawing on both the linguistic turn in critical theory, and the recent psychoanalytic constructions of identification, they emphasize the role of the constitutive outside in the formation of identity. Just as the relationship between the image and the identity of signs is one in which they never quite fit each other, and it is this looseness of symbolic marking which entails further signification and allows the play of differences, similarly the process of identification is in a constant state of oscillation across the boundaries of the self and other.

9. TRACING THE CONTOURS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY

From this perspective, which is clearly indebted to Stuart Hall and Homi Bhabha, there are a number of conceptual advances and modifications which need to be highlighted in order to construct a broader theoretical framework within which the formations of cultural identity could be understood. Both Hall and Bhabha have alerted us to the need for a transformation of the existing theories and paradigms if we are to present an adequate account of the nature of cultural identity in the modern world. The points I would like to emphasize are by no means an exhaustive list, nor the blueprint to a universal model for defining cultural identity. Rather, this preliminary set of points merely provides an outline for a theory of cultural identity. It should be emphasized that the theoretical effect of this outline is to abandon a schematic and deterministic conception of cultural identity. It seeks to acknowledge that cultural identity has its own 'relatively autonomous' formations, whose structural orientations and discursive representations need to be understood according to their own distinctive categories and not as the mere effects of other forces.

First, while the general features of cultural identity are universal, it needs to be understood in terms of its historical specificity. To discuss cultural identity at the level of universality can only produce the banal conclusion that it is simply part of the human

condition and an inevitable part of all social relations. What is more significant about cultural identity is the production of distinctive ways of being human and the construction of particular forms of social relations. It is in the understanding of the particularity and the specificity of cultural identity that there lies a challenge to our broader conceptualizations of subjectivity and sociality in the modern world. Politically, it was, in the first instance, useful to speak of cultural identity in an abstract and general way, in order to counter the racist ideologies that either promoted the inherent superiority of certain identities, or dismissed cultural identity as a sign of inferiority. It also served as a useful category for the promotion of cultural rights which had been hitherto marginalized and ignored by the state. The political strategy of making visible an awareness of cultural identity which was previously invisible must now be redefined at two levels. Cultural identity must be simultaneously defined in terms of its own specificity and particularity while also developing a new mode of solidarity and affinity between counter-hegemonic subject positions. What Stuart Hall termed the end of innocence for the 'essential black subject' applies more generally for the conception of cultural identity in the modern world.¹ Once cultural identity is de-essentialized and it is no longer represented within the binary logic of either good or bad, advanced or backward, then this entails a recognition of the ways its subjectivity is formed across a number of other categories and social divisions.

Second, the appreciation of the uniqueness of cultural identity demands both a framework for understanding and relating to the different formations of cultural identity. If not all cultural identities are the same, then how do we address the complex levels of interaction that emerge when different cultural identities meet? The eurocentric and absolutist methods of ranking cultural identities in terms of the vertical hierarchies of developed or undeveloped, modern or traditional, Western or non-Western are no longer tenable. Similarly, while the relativist position grants a form of

recognition to all cultural identities on the putatively flat horizontal grounds that they have intrinsic values and equal rights to survival, this does not, however, provide a framework for judging between conflicting claims when different cultural identities compete for space. One of the most demanding legal and cultural challenges that lies before us is to conceive of a framework which will be able to negotiate across the boundaries of cultural identities. This would require an understanding of both the orientation and status given to cultural identity by its own members, and the socio-political context within which these cultural identities are operating.

Third, while only a minority of cultural identities are defined in relation to national characteristics, and in the absence of global structures for the evaluation and protection of the rights to cultural identity, it is necessary to understand the definition of cultural identity in relation to the social and juridical structures of the nation state. In some contexts the development of cultural identities within certain parameters is encouraged as expressive of the diversity of a multicultural polity, whereas in others the articulation of a non-hegemonic cultural identity is perceived as a threat to the coherence and stability of the nation state. The tensions and contradictions of cultural identity cannot be understood unless they are also situated in relation to the projects of nation building. Both the civic and communal institutions that operate within the state, ranging from education, welfare and health to religion, social movements and cultural organizations, play an active role in either sustaining or inhibiting the formations of cultural identity. These institutions, and their inter-relationship with cultural identity, need to be examined, not simply as neutral instruments or as exclusively coercive regimes, but in terms of the agonistic construction of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic identities.

Fourth, cultural identity has to be situated in a non-reductive relationship with the other social divisions of class and gender. The articulation of a given cultural identity may impact on the way

class and gender relations are conducted within a specific community, but also affect the way relations are expressed across various social boundaries. Class relations and gender rules that are considered as part of the code of cultural identity can be perceived as oppressive and restrictive by some members. There needs to be a greater appreciation of the way cultural identities are contested within certain communities in order to highlight the complex nexus among class, gender and cultural identity. To privilege class or gender over cultural identity is to presume that there are some aspects of social relations which are either determined by, or subordinate to, others. This approach would obscure the way these categories, of either class or gender, are also formed in a culturally specific way.

Fifth, the process of identification in cultural identity needs to be understood in a context of ambivalence. The conditions of belonging to—and the upholding of—a cultural identity are uneven and contestatory. The aspects of cultural identity which are desirable to one member may be repulsive to another. The strength of cultural identity is often tested by the way these tensions, which may occur inter-generationally or across class and gender boundaries, are negotiated. Furthermore, in the racist contexts of post-colonialism and the emergence of diasporic communities in pluralist societies, the formations of cultural identity are pincerred between stigma and stereotypes. These forms of identification, which precede and invariably constrain subjectivity, create negative pressures on the articulation of a cultural identity. However, it must also be noted that loathing and loving have a tendency to switch in what Hall calls a doubling act, whereby ‘fear and desire double for one another and play across the structures of otherness, complicating its politics’.² What is violently rejected in one phase may be celebrated in another. The names given in scorn may be subsequently adopted as badges of pride. The burden of the past, which may appear unbearable in one time, can be transformed into a vaulting board in another. Hence, the role of the past and the significance of symbols may

present us with unexpected forms of resilience and yield unanticipated consequences. Cultural identities which are dismissed outright by a subject in one political setting have a tendency to return and haunt the beholder in another. It is therefore important to consider the resources with which a cultural identity is formed and their associative values. Stereotypes, both positive and negative, are a crucial index of the contestation that occurs both at the borders and within the notion of cultural identity.

Sixth, cultural identity is formed through unconscious processes; it is not an innate and predetermined category. The desires and drives of cultural identity have a distinctive logic which is often contrary to the rational and instrumental structures that are paraded in hegemonic discourse. By definition, the unconscious side of cultural identity is not representable in a straightforward manner, it can only be glanced by excavating and 'working through' the symbolic processes of language and dreams. Four of the key concepts in Bhabha's writing—fetish, stereotype, mimicry and splitting—can serve as useful tropes for investigating the complex processes of the unconscious in cultural identity.

Seventh, this approach would encourage us to identify the heterological character of cultural identity. The name of a given cultural identity can contain within it a variety of subjectivities. The process of identification within a cultural identity is always generative and incomplete. There is no absolute standard which defines the fullness or emptiness, the maturity or backwardness of a cultural identity. One never arrives at the point where a cultural identity is settled and fixed into place, and one cannot achieve a sense of cultural identity which can block out further changes. Given that the dynamic of cultural identity is driven towards renewal and transformation, it must therefore be accepted that there will be an ongoing antagonism and conflict in the structural orientation and discursive representation of its self-image. There can be no assumed correspondence between all the forms of subjectivity within the concept of cultural identity.

10. THE ART OF PASSING IN CULTURAL IDENTITY

In the period of early modernism the sign of cultural identity was confined to what was left behind, a trace of what had been lost or superseded by the advances of modernity. Within the vaulted chambers of high culture and the penile skyscrapers of Manhattan, cultural identity was relegated to the dustbin of history. The modernist myths of progress and individualism were premised on the transcendence of cultural identity. This promise was as illusory as the presumption that the European male was the universal subject of history. With the decolonization of the Third World, the shift of global power from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and the internal critique of modernity, there emerged a re-evaluation of cultural identity. The sign of cultural identity became fused with the call for roots in a rootless world, and it began to shift from a sign of weakness and embarrassment to a sign of strength and celebration. From neo-primitivism to multiculturalism, we have witnessed a redrawing of the boundaries of difference. The selective incorporation of the other and the (restricted) permission to celebrate diversity have emerged as the dominant modes for articulating new forms of cultural identity. This inversion of the status of cultural identity has generated a new range of personal choices in private lives, and stimulated the gastronomic options in the leisure industry of metropolitan cities, but it has also left within its wake the

ghoulish strategies of 'ethnic cleansing', and the lazy tolerance of cultural relativism which, as Warren Christopher noted, is 'the last refuge of repression'. The 'resurgence of ethnicity' has also produced the most abject forms of cultural racism and the most extreme reactions against the homogenizing force of globalization.¹

More than ever, the conceptual terms of cultural identity need to be revisited. It can no longer be used as the concept that legitimates an inward-looking vision and demarcates the exclusivity of social practices. Cultural identity is best understood as a metaphor for the way we make sense of our position in the world. It is an elastic metaphor, one which stretches and embraces the ways in which we live. This broadening and positive reevaluation of the concept is related to three fundamental changes. First, the distinction between tradition and modern is no longer conceived in terms of a binary opposition. Second, the concept of culture has been given a broader scope. Third, the certitudes of modernity have been revealed as impossible, illusive, distorted, counterproductive and exhausted. In the context of postmodernity the sign of cultural identity has been embraced as a sign of renewal and depth. Within the context of postmodernism, and its deep fascination with difference, the sign of cultural identity shifted from a signifier of loss to one of surplus. It stands apart from the idealized subject of early modernity, the square-jawed, forward-looking and techno-driven individual that adorned the posters of both socialist and nationalist regimes.

Mixture and experimentation, displacement and reconfiguration, collage and juxtaposition have become the cultural practices which are now seen as most expressive of our times. While the project of identity was once seen as leading towards stability and durability, and the settled citizen was the subject of history, the project of identity is now preoccupied, as Zygmunt Bauman reminds us, with how to maximize mobility and minimize attachment, and the exemplary subject is now seen as a migrant, an exile, a stranger.² Identities are made on the move. Cultural survival is

increasingly defined according to the ability to keep moving. Forms of identity, Bauman argues, such as the stroller, the vagabond, the tourist and the player, which were once only found on the margins of society, or experienced during the liminal moments of personal development, are now constituted as the lifestyles which are most suited to the contingencies of the post-modern condition. In this context the reconceptualization of cultural identity in the guise of the hybrid, creolized, diasporic subject has presented a number of very positive gains. It has enabled the debates on identity to go beyond the binary logic of us and them; it has presented a new mode of internalizing the fragments of modernity while also excavating marginalized traditions; and it has encouraged a 'passionate research' into the intellectual challenges of the time without disengaging the body from its emotional range. Cultural identity is thereby defined by the way ideas and practices which have crossed frontiers find new homes; it is a way of coming to terms with the past without ignoring the pressures of the present, an expression of belonging which does not lock the individual into a single place. The dream of a single home is gone, only to be replaced by the daunting promise of multiple affiliations. The image of integrated and unified being has been overtaken by a process of translation that is marked by a consciousness that is more open to the contradictory passages of becoming. The integrity of traditions that were previously premised on spurious notions of purity, are now being traced out in terms of the complex crossovers and intersections of cultural exchange. These new conjunctions and innovations in cultural identity have heightened what Edward Said calls 'contrapuntal, sympathetic and concrete' perspectives, which may ultimately enable us to slowly dismantle the hierarchies of a colonizing mentality.³

Photography allows us to see the passages that have occurred in the culture of modernity. It has not only documented epic events but also the details of daily life. Broad structural transformations

can be read in the shifts of personal relations, gestures and expressions. By capturing the intimacies of identity photography has also provided a mirror for understanding culture. What makes an image iconic is not just its formal and aesthetic power, but its capacity to provoke reflection. Pausing before a photograph of a stranger, we may have no knowledge of the details of their life but there is still the opportunity to reflect on the similarities and differences between our experiences. What the photograph reveals in all its detail is the trace not the cause of an event. In that trace there is still the sign of intimacy. The face has been the focus of photography. It carries some of the extremes of our emotions, and it is while looking at other faces that we can reflect on qualities of character. Today we have loaded so many questions on the image of the face. We are always looking for signs of well-being and health or searching for the evidence of how a life is lived by the contours of expression.

Photography is not just the most efficient technology for memory work, it is also the mirror which promises to reflect the secrets of the self. The popularity of photography is linked to our narcissism. In the first decade of the camera's invention over 90 per cent of all photographs were portraits. Throughout the twentieth century the representation of ideas and commodities were invariably linked to faces. The revolution had Lenin and Che Guevara. Science had Einstein with electric silver hair and eyes as deep as the universe. Estée Lauder had Liz Hurley until wrinkles insinuated themselves into her image. Long before the camera there were statues of the Buddha and paintings of Christ, but these sacred images were not anywhere and everywhere. The face today is ubiquitous. It can inspire courage, wonder and admiration, but is also part of the banal visual landscape through which we pass in states of boredom, anxiety and haste. How often do we stop to reflect on the meaning of a face?

Photography can stimulate the ancient art of physiognomy. Greeks have always believed that character is not only discerned

by psychoanalysis but also by observing the expressions and features of a face. The perversion of this art into a pseudo-science by the Victorian eugenicists is not to be confused with the more metaphorical investigations into the meaning of appearances. The art of physiognomy teaches us to look for the flow of certain qualities that emerge in the expressions of a face, rather than the boundary of abilities that are indexed according to the structures of the head. This practice is exercised in many ways. For instance, students could be seen as practising this daydreaming art. By decorating their rooms with posters of heroes and postcards of paintings by Modigliani, they could be searching for a visual expression of ideal types of character and establishing a measure for their own mind and body.

Photography has extended this contemplation into the connection between appearance and action. Every photographer questions the power of their subject in relation to their photogenic qualities. To recognize photogenic qualities is not necessarily a qualitative judgement about inherent beauty or power, but can be a way of distinguishing the intensity and expressivity of information. A photogenic face can achieve an expression that minimizes the need for the photographer to aestheticize the image. With the technical effect of light manipulation or even air-brushing and montage a photographer can add virtually anything to a face. The photogenic face is one that is already aestheticized. To use Roland Barthes' expression, it is already 'embellished' with certain meanings.

The other side of attraction is repulsion. Here, too, photography has an opportunity to suspend and reframe judgement. How do you show other people in all their naked mess in a way that does not add to the burden of life? Photographers are conscious that the task is not to add pain but find signs of tenderness. If photography betrays the intimacy that is offered, then it will only crush the hope that lights the need for an image. A recent series of photographs by Polixeni Papapetrou invite speculation into the links between physiognomy and photogenic qualities. This link is

both heightened and almost overshadowed by another relationship which is staged in her photographs: the role of clothes in the projection of identity. Individual works from this series by Papapetrou are composed in a triptych formation. At the centre there is always the reproduction of a typical Renaissance painting of a regal figure. The embellishments on the royal gowns are the most vivid and intricate display of power, but they also almost choke their subjects. The expressivity of the body is cosseted into stiff authority. By contrast, these regal figures are flanked by contemporaries of Papapetrou, who are dressed in the casual uniform of jeans and loose fitting T-shirts. The only distinguishing feature in all the contemporary clothing is the visible brand name.

A whole generation has passed since Tommy Hilfiger put his logo on the outside of his clothing. He was only making explicit what every person who chose Levi over Lee jeans was already doing: associating taste with a specific kind of image. In the past decade, every fashion house from Versace to Gaultier, Calvin Klein to Donna Karan—whose labels are generally associated with luxury—is now in global competition to disperse its corporate identity in cheap and mass-produced basic items, like T-shirts. For people who share the same dream of being inside a space of privilege and distinction there is no easier way than the proud display of the maker on your chest. Capitalism feeds off insecurity. Any uncertainty about identity can be passed over by adopting a brand. The use of a brand name encourages the consumer to feel as if they have passed into the space they dream of. Not because they appear like unpaid mobile advertisements, but because the association with a brand is meant to spill over into other spaces of identification. The brand is on display to signify membership of an acceptable style of living. As with fans of sporting teams, this attachment to a brand creates a sense of belonging that compensates or protects from the peril of being outside, alone, without an identity. But there are limits to this form of membership; Papapetrou's subjects are wearing Prada T-shirts. However, this

leaves the rest of the body to the elements. Unlike the regal figures in the centre of Papapetrou's photographs, the arms of all the flanking contemporary figures are naked. They may be crossed but the fold of their arms and the contrast of their skin only helps to hold up the name of the brand. It is at this intersection that the paradox of *passing* is at its most exquisite. The boundaries of class and distinction are crossed only to be upheld as they are deferred to a ever more distant and unreachable point. Carole-Anne Tyler has summed up the contradictions of passing in the most comprehensive manner:

Ours is the era of the passing of *passing* as a politically viable response to oppression. It seems fitting that passing is a verb with no noun subject form since it is an activity whose agent is obscured, immersed in the mainstream rather than swimming against the tide, invisible to the predatory eye in search of its mark. Passing has become the sign of the victim, the practice of one already complicit with the order of things, prey to its oppressive hierarchies—if it can be seen at all. For the mark of passing successfully is the lack of a mark of passing, of a signifier of some difference from what one seems to be. In fact, passing can only name the very failure of passing, an indication of a certain impossibility at its heart, of the contradictions which constitute it: life/death, being/non-being, visibility/invisibility, speech/silence, difference/sameness, knowledge/ignorance, coming out/mimicry. Passing the effect of a certain affect, an uncanny feeling of uncertainty about a difference which is not quite invisible, not quite unknown, not quite non-existent—a sort of life in death, in which otherness appears on the verge of extinction, dying into the self-sameness it still lacks even as it lacks difference.⁴

Identity cannot be found in the name of the label or even in the way the T-shirt is worn. We have to return to the more inscrutable links between physiognomy and photogenic qualities. This link can be made explicit if we read Papapetrou's photographs horizontally. The nature of the triptych is panoramic. However, there is also the temptation to read each unit separately and then add the three units together to form a single image. This method would focus the eye in a series of vertical directions that may miss the connection that occurs between the eyes of her historical and contemporary subjects. Within the triptych, the gaze of each person often shares a common shape. In some cases it is a conspiratorial look, in others a bold eyeballing of the camera that is in their face. In every instance, the contemporary subject is declaring themselves as the imperious centre of their own identity. The brand of the T-shirt is no match to the power of this gaze. It is in the tension of the skin, the poise of the body, the countenance of the eye that we read the complex fold and maps of identity.



4. JORMA PURANEN 'SPECULUM ORBIS TERRAE',
1998.

11. FLAGS IN THE LANDSCAPE

The affinity I feel with Jorma Puranen's work is not based on a common origin. Our homelands are at the furthest point apart, yet despite this profound geographic distance, there are close bonds that are formed through the recognition of an historical optic, a way of looking at the land with a curious eye—one that asks it to answer questions of how we belong. Of course, the landscape remains mute, teasing us with its indomitable silence and we keep returning with more questions before falling into moments of our own silent appreciation. Between the poles of calm silence and muttering awe there are the occasional gifts of visual and textual metaphor.

In the series *Curiosus Naturae Spectator*, 1998, Puranen printed Latin words on silk sheets which were in turn carefully placed into the landscape as a deliberate act of disruption or a new framing of a particular scene. Latin was the language of the Enlightenment, the language of poets and philosophers, but also the hard language of reason and classification. It is this language that makes our distance from nature most explicit. Maybe it is not so much a distance as a difference, for if language can be compared to a screen, then the width of the screen can be as delicate and translucent as the sheets and folds of silk that he inserted into the landscape. These silk sheets resemble pages and

curtains, reminding us of this difference between language and landscape. There is something theatrical about this gesture. It haunts those earlier texts—those geographies and ethnographies, writings of lands and pagans in contrast to which the self-image of the metropolitan Europe was defined. Before anthropology was invented for the investigation of the non-Western other, the concept of the exotic had already existed, and it always lay at the frontier, the outpost and margins of the European consciousness.

The sciences of studying other lands and other people were often framed through the rhetorical tropes of the theatre. To see them the audience had to be safely seated in such a position that they could recognize the exotic as part of that distant land of the make-believe. Today, the spectator has become slightly more adventurous. He or she might travel to the 'exotic' location itself, armed with the technologies of reportage, and frame the land, over and over again, within the camera. This subtle gesture of inserting a sheet into the landscape challenges this trajectory. Puranen has entered the landscape, to set the scene, to reconfigure the role of the stage in our imaginary landscapes. He returns to the position of the man behind the camera but his presence remains in the frame.

Following from the French philosopher Michel Serres's definition of the productive dissonance caused by the interference within communication, I would say that Puranen has presented us with a new 'parasite' between landscape and language. Serres's concept of the parasite notes the dissonance within the process of transmission, but also the tension between the origin sign and its reception. He notes that in language we can barely receive messages with any degree of clarity. However, this is the interference that also beckons a new relationship between, say, the object of perception that exists in its ecology and its name in language. We need a language that can lean into the tilting horizon, touch the jagged edges of abandoned quarries, echo the

rippling of waves against snowy shoals. If we were to find such a vantage point then, every footprint in the dirt, each tree which stands like a poisoned crucifix, all the scratches on the face of slate—which are recorded in Puranen’s photographs—then we would also read these signs as scars that both mark the body of language and articulate the pained history of the landscape.

In *Curiosus Naturae Spectator*, 1998, place names emerge like abandoned signposts. But their presence also issues a sense that they are meant to work like border guards. Puranen self-consciously uses Latin terms. *Terra Incognita*. *Terra Exagitatorum*. The irony is unmistakable. For whom is the sign of the land unknowable? Who has stretched the meaning of these signs? No matter which language articulates a place name, the name itself remains untranslatable. Kola. Islandiae. Biarmia. Nova Zemla. Lapponiae. Funmarchia. Groenlandiae. These names are not negotiable. They resist the stretch and twist of translation. Translation finds its limit before a place name. There is no point looking for comparable terms in another language. A place name is like a rock. You either acknowledge it in all its fullness, or you bypass it. Puranen’s images demonstrate that the language of colonialism failed to learn this lesson: being unable to either bow or bend to the other, it wrapped difference in its own self-styled drapery.

Paul Carter, in his seminal history of the colonization of Australia, *The Road to Botany Bay*, was right to stress that space/geography was not just the neutral stage upon which time/history enacted their given roles. Space is always an active force in our perception of being and change. The tension between and within different names often echoes a struggle suppressed by imperial history. This struggle is evident in the moral void behind the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard’s, inability to articulate the word ‘sorry’. Haunted by the white ghosts, steeled with a cool rage and analytical resentment, he stonewalled every request to give back the names that were trammelled, or even

speak into the history which links the present with a barbarous past. The drapery of colonialism may be gone, but that imperious gaze has turned into an inward-looking and self-protecting resentment against difference.

By a curious means of reversal, Puranen found a way to continue exploring ideas that were proposed in his earlier body of work *Imaginary Homelands*, 1991. The symbolic focus in the staging of homecomings shifted from the manipulation of theatrical devices of the curtain and the screen to the use of flags. Attention moved from the act of reframing to reclaiming the identity of a landscape. In a later body of work, *Language is a Foreign Country*, 2000, Puranen once again created environmental installations that, in turn, were photographed to form a new series of images. In both instances Puranen questioned our conventional assumptions about the relationship between perception and memory of landscape.

Flags speak across distances that voices cannot reach. Announcing a presence that may still lurk below the audible horizons. From land to sea. From invader to defender. From near to far. Long before the formal language of semaphore, flags have been used to warn, invite, threaten, promise, that is, to issue in advance of physical presence or live speech a message of direction or communicate the sense of either welcome or exclusion.

Flags are like boundary markers. Knowing how to read the flag will influence the state of mind with which you will proceed. To not even recognize a flag when it is in your path, is in itself a sign that you shouldn't be there. The lesson of the flag and the meaning of its symbol are best learnt in advance of the journey and not belatedly. There is little comfort in the rescue that is accompanied with the words: 'Didn't you see the flag?' Every landscape is filled with flags of welcome and warning. To remain oblivious to them is to enter at your own peril.

Flags can also speak across the generations when the voices of the living and the dialogue with the dead have been silenced.

Another form of temporal announcement is still possible by means of the flag. A flag marks the spot where there was once something else. A community. A camp. A history. Below and around the flag there can be a territory. This form of signposting does not always register the complex histories of the past. Grasslands may have reclaimed the clearings, ashes stopped smouldering, and the presence of ruins faded from view.

To return to plant a flag in such a landscape may be a gesture that admits a loss of memory. In the silent wake of defeat, the planting of a flag can be like a statement against the abyss of oblivion. It can be the last marker of lost territory, or at the other end of politics, the absurd gesture of colonizing the skies. (Surely the most ridiculous flag is the static American one that is stuck on the moon.) Claiming the moon as, let us say, the 55th state of America may well be the zenith of imperialism but the use of the flag as a marker of an outpost carries with it a long history of associations.

The phallic act of staking your claim by inserting a flag into the ground and allowing your colours to unfurl in the wind is a longstanding tradition in the act of conquering the unknown. In the period of Western colonialism the ceremony of raising the flag was the central ritual for expressing control and domination. 'In the name of the British Empire I claim...' While the flag was going up from the ground and into the skies, the place upon which the representative of the crown stood would also be renamed.

The flag and the name are synchronous gestures for claiming authority over space. Indigenous names, like other signs of occupancy, were either mostly overlooked, mistaken, or ignored. In the extreme case all signs of place were declared void by the act of *terra nullius*. Names were given as fitted the serendipity of the colonizer's moment of encounter with the other, or their obligation to flatter a distant patron. Rarely did the colonizer have the ears to hear the names or the eyes to read the flags or other

signs with which indigenous people marked their own homelands.

In recent years artists have made near treasonable representations of flags. The Australian flag in glomesh and velvet. The member flags of the European Union assembled in black and white. The Union Jack repainted in the Irish tricolour. African American flags invented and then staked in blocks of melting ice.

Puranen's flags are both more impenetrable and less direct. They are alluring to me because they seem to address not a single claim about territory but a whole narrative about a space that lies beyond my travels. His use of flags also reverses the conventional relationship between ground and symbol. The flag is meant to stand out. It is a representative. It refers to a specific territory and yet it is also a mobile sign. It moves about and as a sign it stands in the place of something else. Puranen breaks with this tradition of reading flags. He has created a spatial conflation between the flag and the ground. Whether it is the team of white backgrounds against floating ice in a river or against the speckled side of a hill, or even the blue backgrounds set against a mass of water, the flags begin to mimic and merge with the landscape. These flags have ambiguous claims, issuing messages but also camouflaging into the terrain.

This double strategy of revealing and concealing a history is most evident to me when the choice of words that are boldly printed onto the flags is in the English language. On the hillside near an outpost with a vast satellite dish there is a series of flags with words that I can read but I do not understand. Mattat. Ruva. Hella. These words are like headings for an investigation into something missing. Their message is haunting. This is a use of flag that is closer to the melancholy signs of ruin and loss rather the triumphalist gesture of conquest and domination.

In other places all the flags have words that are foreign to me. Perhaps all languages are foreign in the country of modernity. For, if modernity is a place in which there is the dream that there

is only one language, and all other languages are reduced to the mutterings of ba ba ba, then we are truly in the star-spangled home of the new barbarians.



5. PHILLIP GEORGE, 'DIASPORA', 1998.

12. THE SECRET LITTLE BAY

In 1969 Christo wrapped one million square feet of the coast on Little Bay, Sydney. The effect of wrapping the coast in an opaque mesh material was often described through dazzling paradoxes: it was said that in the summer light it became highly reflective, giving the project a 'glacial quality'.¹ The surrounding elements were seen as being raised to a level of exquisite union: 'it was a work which made the land resemble the sea, earth resemble water'.² Christo's attraction to the site was fairly simple; it represented an opportunity to work with a surface which was both complex in its physical and cultural dimensions and—unlike the Californian coastline for which he first envisaged the project—it was available.

Modern Australian culture has been primarily associated with the coast. The desert interior and the urban sprawl were, in the late 1960s, still perceived as something to which the country had turned its back. Coastal life represented the ideal in the Australian imaginary; it was where social differences seemed to matter least, or at least, one was led to believe that they could be temporarily left behind. Where the land met the water, the tensions between past and present, being and becoming could be suspended. Under the sun and with the sound of the surf, the city could feel far away. Despite this intense fascination with the sea in our urban dreaming, the sea has never been a major subject for Australian art. After

work, on the weekend and throughout our holidays, we spend a great deal of time on the beach, often staring endlessly with boundless awe at the horizon where the two blues of sky and sea meet. Yet, this view out and this place from where we stand have rarely been the subject of contemporary art and photography.

Christo's action of wrapping the coastline was, at the time, perceived as a gesture to heighten this reverie of the edge. The utopian power of Christo's Little Bay was, in the eyes of the critics, at its most intense when the imagination was turned away from the city and the problems of the land. According to Daniel Thomas, the 'cliff-top viewpoint was wrong: from it one could see a prison, a hospital and some domestic housing as well as the sand, rocks, cliffs, surf and ships at sea...the ideal viewing position was the sand'.³ These comments are consistent with the formalist branch of art history, which saw environmental art as merely extending aesthetic practices rather than as a visual participant in a broader debate on urban decay and the impact of industrialization on modern culture. The reconfiguring of the political and aesthetic binarisms on place is a necessary goal when following the legacy of Christo's action in Little Bay.

Thirty years later, as a critical act of commemoration, Phillip George returned to Little Bay. He re-examined Christo's strategy of revelation through concealment by not just thinking of the sublime relation between art and nature, but by asking the deceptively simple question: 'What was Christo trying to hide?' From this vantage point further questions followed. What sort of vision is necessary to see the signs of history that may be lurking beneath the surface? Why did the artwork seek to reflect the sky and water and not reveal the histories of arrival, settlement and exile from this land? How will we ever learn to live with strangers when we continue to look away at the very moment when others approach us? These questions will enable a new examination of not only the interconnections between aesthetic and political practices in environmental art, but also probe the way Christo touched questions

about place, memory and the symbolism of nature which were repressed in the Australian imaginary.

A series of photographs of Little Bay followed, which revealed a most unlikely history. Images of Byzantine saints are found on the walls of the caves. Greek icons washed up in small rock pools. By a curious transposition of lens and computer, Phillip George links Little Bay to the garden paradise of Mount Athos in Greece—a place that so dazzled the Virgin Mother she asked her son to dedicate it to her as a gift. Like the icons that washed up in Little Bay, the Virgin Mother landed on the shores of Mount Athos by accident. Her ship, en route to Cyprus, was diverted from its course by storms. The monks who settled there vowed to maintain the order that was based on the Bible's explanation for man's expulsion from the original garden. They celebrated their chastity along with the other two virtues of poverty and obedience. To this day hermits are scattered throughout the peninsula of Mount Athos, living a life of total isolation, seeking out the most remote caves, which are virtually inaccessible by land and barely visible by sea. For them the Virgin Mary is the key to 'theosis', to the metamorphosis of 'man into god and god into man'. In their darkness they meditate; food is lowered into their caves in woven baskets. When the monks from a nearby monastery return to replenish this supply and discover that the basket has remained untouched they know that the hermit has reached his beloved destiny. Nikos Kazantsakis, in his *Report to the Greco*,⁴ tells us of his visit to Mount Athos through an encounter with such a hermit.

Why are you smiling, Father? I asked.

How can I keep from smiling? I am happy, my child. Each day, each hour, I hear the mule's hoofbeats: I hear death approaching.

The icons that surface in Phillip George's photographs of Little Bay, speak of an uneasiness with the prohibition of every eunuch,

beardless person, female animal, child or woman from their earthly paradise on Mount Athos. It was possibly due to these restrictions that they slipped out to sea and sought refuge in an almost forgotten part of Sydney.

Returning to Little Bay after Christo's departure, and with the memory of these icons at our feet, another sort of reverie is provoked. In moments of translucent stillness, when the water is just a blue filter through which we see life, we can forget the violence of the sea. Our gaze oscillates between the tranquil blue horizon line and the giant rocks which have been flung from the bottom of the Bay by tidal waves. The catapulting force of the sea can defy description. For the sailors and migrants who survived the journey there is the struggle to find words for the fury of the sea. In Phillip George's images of Saints their testament is best witnessed through the silent 'look' in their eyes. The turbulence of the Pacific Ocean crashing against the shores of Little Bay couldn't be more contrary to the placidness of the Aegean as it laps up against Mount Athos, but Phillip George has found a certain blueness in their waters that links these places. This blue is also a metaphor for the restless journey. Nothing is ever at rest. In the tranquil rock pools Phillip George sees a spiritual frame. It resembles the iconostasis upon which the *tama*—small silver offerings that depict the source of pain—are placed to beckon the call for healing. In both places there is a silent rippling over the static gestures of saints. When will the spiritually enlightened and the physically sick leave the darkness of their caves? Before contemplating the reality or unreality of this discovery it is worth retracing the journey from the city to the Bay, to frame the site from the viewpoint which is described as 'wrong'.

The Australian coastline was one of the last places to be fully mapped by the Western colonial powers. It had been central to the Western imaginary, long before its natural and cultural reality was known. Since Ptolemy drew a map of the world in 140 AD it was presumed that a large southern mass must exist in

order to counterbalance the known regions of the north. Up until the sixteenth century this view was undisputed, and even when it was first encountered by Europeans this continent was still named as the 'Third World', 'The Austral' and 'Terra Incognita'. Australia was known by its otherness, as the antipodes of the known North. It is perhaps no accident that the descendants of Ptolemy now search for their origin on these shores.

Phillip George, one such descendent, surfs in these bays daily. He knows the history and movements intimately. Little Bay is owned by the Prince Henry Hospital of Infectious Diseases. Walking along the beach, one can see the brick and concrete remnants of houses. It is difficult to imagine that they were built there, but equally difficult to conceive how they could have been washed up by the sea. North of the Bay is the suburb of Malabar, named after the hill in Bombay where the Parsees lay their dead to rest and awaited the vultures to assist in that final celestial journey. In the immediate proximity of Little Bay are a rifle range, Long Bay Gaol and the Eastern Suburbs cemetery and crematorium. Just nine miles from the centre of Sydney, and at the end of Anzac Parade—another symbol for the birth of the nation from the crucible of war—Little Bay contains secrets that are normally kept out of our official history.

On the other side of Little Bay there is the suburb of La Perouse that is named after the French explorer who arrived in Botany Bay just four days after the First Fleet in 1788. After their brief attempt to establish a colony the French departed, no doubt coming to the same conclusion over Botany Bay as Governor King, who described it as 'exposed ... swampy ... with insufficient water ... and possibly unhealthy'. These first impressions had a lasting impact on the development of the headland. During the 1880s the peninsula was declared the future industrial site for noxious trades. The first telegraph station that received the underwater cables between Australia and New Zealand was based in La Perouse in 1882. Behind this station, which is now a museum dedicated to La

Perouse—who amongst other things had the perspicacity to reject the young Napoleon as one of his junior officers—is the ominous sight of the AWA wireless towers and military antennae.

As a defence against any future invasion through the ‘back door’ of Sydney, garrisons were also placed in La Perouse and a fort built on Bare Island in 1885. The Gwyeagal and Kameygal peoples, who had been living there for over 20,000 years, were almost all killed by a smallpox plague in 1779. Those who became infected were isolated from their community. Obed West, a witness of the plague, describes the use of the caves along the Bay as a quarantine area for the sick:

On the south side of the bay 200 yards back from the beach was a large overhanging rock. This was shown to me by the blacks as the place where all who had the disease went. The blacks had a great horror of the disease and were afraid to go near any who were suffering ... patients were made to go into the cave, when at intervals, food, principally fish, would be laid on the ground some little distance away. Sufferers who were able to would collect it and then go back to the caves ... a great many died. When passing the cave, later known as the Black’s Hospital, I have seen numbers of skulls and bones scattered about, the remains of those who had perished in the plague.⁵

By the 1860s Aboriginal people returned to the area, living in shantytowns, and by 1894 the Methodists established a mission house overlooking the Bay. They formally complied with the duty of the segregation of the races. La Perouse became known as ‘black camp’. Gypsies who travelled along the coast would also camp annually on the site. After the Depression, unemployed families and refugees from the Second World War began to settle there. While La Perouse was being shunned as a place of residence by the Europeans, it still attracted the attentions of soldiers and tourists.

The Aboriginal people were subjected first to abuse, as the soldiers who were stationed nearby treated the women as prostitutes, and then as objects of curiosity. The first forms of tourist trade in decorated boomerangs and shell ornaments began in La Perouse. In the post-war period, this uneasy separation of the races began to dissolve, and an index of the new form of displacement is provided in a profoundly understated manner by Peter McKenzie, a curator and historian who came from the Aboriginal community in La Perouse:

In the 1950s, as the postwar housing boom penetrated La Perouse, Aboriginal families found themselves surrounded (and outnumbered) by white residents. A gesture made by these new residents indicates the racial tensions this influx produced: they successfully petitioned Randwick Council to change the name of the street on the southern border of the (Aboriginal) Reserve from 'Aborigines Avenue' to 'Endeavour Avenue'.⁶

At almost the exact spot where Captain Cook and the First Fleet landed there is now a massive oil refinery and on the opposite side of Botany Bay an electric power station. At the time Christo wrapped the coastline, the land above Little Bay served as a rubbish dump. The New South Wales golf club has now extended its greens along the coastal cliff top. The Prince Henry Hospital for Infectious Diseases is in a sad state of decline, windows are largely boarded up, patients can be seen wandering about, as if lost in a Fellini film. At the edge of the coast, the University of New South Wales' Business School has found a new life in an old ward. Nurses sunbathe in a fenced off area. Businessmen discuss deals as they march between holes. Daring fishermen cast long lines from the treacherous rocks. The airport at the end of Botany Bay—which was referred to as the 'bullock paddock', as it was previously an area where cattle were fattened prior to being slaughtered in the

adjoining abattoirs—is visible, but the air traffic is surprisingly inaudible: Little Bay is in the crook between the North-South and East-West flight paths and there are no direct flights overhead. Passenger ships have ceased but the tankers and container ships still silently make their way to the port of Botany Bay.

Names change. The links between the naming and the identity of a place twist and turn. Nowhere in Australia has this incommensurability between the colonial practice of naming and the savage impact of contact been so brutal as in Botany Bay. When Cook first arrived, the abundance of large stingrays occasioned its naming as Stingray Bay, then when Banks reported his delight in the diversity of plant life, Cook substituted it with the name Botany Bay. The record kept by Parkinson makes this clear. ‘From the number of curious plants we met with on shore, we called the bay Botany-Bay.’⁷ It is ironic that the legacy of the arrival of the British colonizer was the destruction of almost all the forms of plant life that gave this place its name.

Phillip George’s photographs of Little Bay have none of the material presence that Christo’s project evoked. No matter the proportions or the technology used to reproduce the images of the coast there is no competition with nature. There is not even the attempt to accentuate a certain vision of nature. When Phillip George makes reference to Christo’s action it is in the spirit of a debt: a form of attachment that finds value in the service to the other. It is a similar kind of debt that is expressed to the Aboriginal people. They both know something that Phillip George cannot fully grasp. Phillip George can return to the site and speculate. Slowly he offers his own contribution in the form of a critical extension rather than critical opposition. Christo and Phillip George responded to the spirituality of the place by working in a paradoxical manner. Christo covered the surface to reflect back an awareness of the scale and quality that it contains. Phillip George projected images from his own religious heritage to capture the ghostly presence in the place. Both gestures highlight an enduring

energy that radiates from the site. It can be found in the interplay of the cave's darkness and the sparkling light that reflects on the crashing waves.

Phillip George's aim is to look at this coastline as a point of arrival and departure for different histories and cultures. His practice is a direct attack on our trained incapacity to see and live with difference. The very process of diaspora, the dispersal of community from its homeland, is represented in an iconic form—that is, the body of a stranger that exists in a space that the city ignores. The stranger as pariah, ascetic or saint has a long history in Western philosophy, but in the context of Australian beach culture this figure has not even been given the status of an anachronism. Phillip George has set out to play with the illusions of such invisible figures in our popular imaginary. The strangers are not ghosts who return to haunt us for the sins we have tried to forget, rather they are figures which are summoned to suggest a way of being which includes multiplicity and difference.

The use of photography as a medium for this mode of speculation is in itself a disruptive technique. Phillip George is aware of the powers of documentation and revelation in photography, and in these images he takes these powers to their most elastic point. Through computer-generated practices of montage he creates new landscapes. These are not meant to represent alternative realities, but what he calls 'parallel illusions' that can break the surface of the conventional visions. He projects images of Byzantine saints not to bring home souvenirs from his own journeys, but to question the possibility of other histories on our imaginary shorelines. Did these images follow or precede him? Who put them there? Were they caught up in mysterious oceanic currents and washed up by themselves? Is it a miracle that we see them now? Is it testament to our collective blindness that we have missed them for so long?

In the Byzantium text *Corpus Eremiticum*, there is the following story. Some strangers come to a hermit and ask about his way

of life. The hermit, who is in the course of fetching water from a cistern, draws up the bucket and asks the stranger to take a look down in the well. 'What do you see there?' The stranger looks into the depths and answers, 'Nothing!' After a while the stranger looks down once more into the depths; the hermit again puts his question, and this time the stranger's answer, 'Ourselves, our faces.'

The hermit suggests that self-recognition comes like the stillness of the water, but our journeys—especially those motivated by hunger and thirst—all create turbulence. To look for final answers along the chain of causation would repeat the stigma in our vision that Phillip George is seeking to correct. It is not the reality of whether these images actually landed on our shores, or even that they are trying to leave that is significant, it is the challenge of seeing the signs that have been buried beneath the surface of history. A reconciliation with the past is not to be found by simply excavating and reconnecting all the missing points, but by also imagining new forms of connection between those who are living together. The past does not need to be venerated for its own sake, but rather deserves to be woven into the present patterns of living.

PART III

THE LONG JOURNEY OF SMALL ACTS



6. BRYNDIS SNAEBJORNSDOTTIR, 'STILL FOR BLUE YONDER', 1999.

13. THE PRODUCTION OF SPACES IN ART

What is the visible evidence of presence? Can we see the trace effects of an activity after it has ended? How does the outline of a life reveal itself after a part of it has been cut away? Diaspora, when will you end? These questions haunt me whenever I listen to music in foreign tongues, stare at maps of distant cities, and walk through an exhibition of contemporary art. What chance is there of finding connections amongst strangers?

The culture of modernity is still waiting for the super-camera that will one day record both its absence and its presence. We yearn for a new device that can reveal the fullness of culture, like the way Kirlian photography can capture the glowing outline of a leaf even when a part of it is missing. The 'Aura Research' conducted in the former study of Bertold Brecht and the church in which Nietzsche was baptized by Nina Fischer and Maroan el Sani, resulted in a series of photographs that revealed strange glowing signs of life in these places of absence. This ironic research project returns us to one of the paradoxes of modernity - the search for our modern identity in the ruins of the past. If change is the driving force of modernity, resulting in both losses and gains, then ambivalence is the subjective experience of our time, and the city ñ as archetypal laboratory of social experimentation - will be a place where anticipation is always laced with nostalgia.

In the 1970s, every first-world city with a nineteenth-century port, industrial precinct and manufacturing zone found itself with surplus space. Throughout the post-war period these areas had been in steady decline. In some places, the 1973 oil crisis marked a terminus. The engines stopped. The buildings were abandoned. Production fled to the new low wage manufacturing centres of the developing world, while imports arrived by giant ships too large for the traditional port areas. Weeds and wildlife returned. Manhattan, once the busiest port in the world, gave way to New Jersey. When the city turned its back on its harbour edge and emptied out its warehouses, the artists entered. Then in the late 1980s along came the developers, and by the mid-1990s the captains of cultural industries were already playing new global tunes for civic bands.

All along the docklands, beside railway lines, within the brown-field industrial zones, loomed a great volume of space whose identity was not yet...not quite...not ready...no longer...not really a place. These are parafunctional spaces. Buildings and zones that were designed for one function but have been reclaimed by different people and adapted for alternative uses. Factories and warehouses, once designed as the driving forces and depots of modern production have now become a different kind of waiting space. Sometimes all these places wait for is the slow return of weeds. But, before nature reclaims the city, there is a space for counter-cultural production. The most mobile and nimble, or the homeless and those who dreamed of a different kind of home, were quick to re-enter. They brought with them tools and instruments—not just technical implements, but dreaming devices. Kiosks on wheels came and stayed. They served greasy meals and kept the nostalgia warm.

Let us begin with a proposition. A city's creative potential can be defined by a calculus based on open and closed space, and its cultural density is proportional to the multiple functionalities of the open spaces. The dynamic between the open and the closed is

a creativity index. 'Open' and 'closed' in this equation has nothing do with inside and outside, interior and exterior, nor with the old culture / nature, urban / rural divide. Bio-diversity thrives in enclosed clusters but also slowly creeps, like a desert, into new territories. The critical difference is between the defined and the not-yet-defined. Where the former corresponds to what Deleuze calls 'control space' subject to surveillance and the predictive strategies of contemporary risk management, the latter retains the potential for new and unpredictable alignments and forms of cultural production whose proper name is yet to emerge.

The parafunctional spaces have now come under the spotlight. What was dark and hidden behind crumbling walls, accessible only through the gaps and along narrow tracks surrounded by thistles and waste, is now fenced off with new hurricane fences—pending the approval of plans and the raising of finances. In many instances, these voids stand side-by-side with their old neighbours who have been converted into luxury apartments that double up as offices for some kind of service industry. Where artists had studio spaces and performed large one-off events, there are now major galleries that have large glass entrances, sandblasted walls, polished floors, and those charmingly restored period features—like the pulley that sits idle. The white cube has come to rest in the industrial rustbelt. If these cornices, jutting cranes and exposed concrete beams could speak, what jokes could they tell?

The irregularity of these spaces, the remnants of different kinds of history coexisting and decaying within the present, the complex play of light and darkness all contribute to what we pathetically call the 'character' of a place, but more importantly, they serve as opportunities to discover wonder, and contemplate the weird patterns of history. These thoughtful zones—spaces in which a different kind of thought is possible—are so loaded with resonance and inspiration, partly because they were never intended as places of reverie. There is some peculiar conductor that links the process of thinking to these spaces. Perhaps it is a kind of homage to the

traces of labour and other kinds of effort that survive in the ambience of waste.¹

Such moments of spatial reverie are almost beyond the realms of urban planning and architectural design. When a philanthropist—either state or private—converts and restores an old industrial building into a new contemporary art centre, there is a mixed blessing in this act of redemption and public offering. For some, there is gratitude that an old space has been saved and a new space has been opened. For others, there is resentment that the romance in the place has been kissed to death by the romanticization of the space. In the clean, secure and healthy new environment, where both architectural and also social detritus have been removed from the site, the artist may feel that the old dream has finally been elevated into the public stage. Or has it been tamed by success—a feeling expressed in the muttering of faded pop songs with choruses like ‘inspiration have I none’.

Another complaint lingers in the offering of the industrial building as a shell for contemporary art spaces. Tsoutas compares the utilization of contemporary architecture for the building of new modern museums with the ambivalence towards the space for accommodation for contemporary art.² While the icons of modernism are being archived in spaces exclusively designed by the most prominent architects of our time, the gestures and statements made by contemporary artists are finding refuge in spaces that were formerly designed for different kinds of economic production. This ambivalence may not be as one-sided as Tsoutas suspects. Where he sees a form of public nervousness with the new that results in an act of marginalization and withdrawal, it is possible also to consider a mutual act of distrust and distancing. Why would the contemporary want to be housed in spaces designed as the house of the contemporary? Which architect would they trust to deliver such a house? What kind of patron does the contemporary require? Do we still need a house for the contemporary?

These questions do not merely challenge the old political hierarchies between established and emergent art practices; they also bypass the old polarities between artist and society, and instead search for answers that require new kinds of networks. Today the old industrial ruins are not just a surplus in architectural volume, the wastelands are not just excess urban spaces, 'raw material' for redevelopment; they are also salutary reminders of the limits of belief systems. These spaces are akin to the puncture marks in the worn-out tyres on vehicles that continue to pump out promises of progress and control. These cracks, rips and worn-out zones are attractive to artists because they are the visual and architectural embodiment of the tearing and fading of the line that separates rhetoric from reality. In these parafunctional spaces there is a more tactical play between the ideal and the idea. A new kind of modesty and intensified mobility exist in these spaces. The appeal to universalism and permanence has not been rejected entirely, but it has been suspended, while both artists and intellectuals search for a new language that can communicate the depths of their sincerity and breadth of their commitments. Therefore, who needs another museum? More urgent is the need for platforms, common spaces, meeting grounds, and a new cultural Ting—a reinvention of the communal parliaments—a space where we can gather, negotiate, consider and decide what we need and where we are going.

In many respects, old industrial buildings are the wrong spaces for the production of art and cultural knowledge. However, they are useful places, not just because they are convenient and cheap, but because their wrongness is a prompt, a spur, a starting point to other kinds of thinking. The error of the shell, the irregularity of the wall, the annoyance of the pillars, the strangeness of the darkness, the mess in the basement and the dusty light in the loft, like the unpredictability of the street and the incommensurability of the neighbours, are not just a background. Nor are they like the tyrannical and hyper-competitive, attention-seeking struts and angles of the contemporary museum. Rather, they offer hints at

the hidden layers of transition and entropy that we dare not face. The complexity of mobility and the ineluctable force of decline are barely registered in our official houses of culture.

This transformation of the space and context of art can also be grasped by observing a parallel level of cultural transformation. The shifts in the locations of the institutions of art find an eerie analogy in shifts in aesthetics. The difficult question is no longer ‘What is beauty?’ This question lost its ground over the twentieth century as artists consciously developed a split, dual or hybrid strategy. The aim is now not only to ‘capture’ beauty and produce an aesthetic experience, but also to pursue and participate in the construction of a significant event. The imbrication of the aesthetic in the significant—the sublime in the social—has produced new levels of complexity in contemporary artistic practice. Hence, the form of significance has become as varied and ambiguous as aesthetic form. Just as the latter is not confined to sensorial pleasure or spiritual revelation, so the former is now increasingly dependent on conceptual sophistication and social engagement.

Dirk Snauwert observed, with considerable wryness, the bristling tensions of a photograph of an installation by Jimmie Durham at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) in the 2004 Sydney Biennale. It showed the trademark tartan Doc Marten boots of the MCA Director Liz Anne McGregor coming down the steps. In the well-lit space behind the steps was a large wooden crate filled with everyday objects. They appeared to be the kind of things that you would see on the street before a hard refuse collection. Durham had spent a month in Sydney. He found books on communism and democracy, a surf board, desk lights, ‘golly-wogs’, mirrors, chili-peppers and garlic, and put them all in a crate with the name ‘Central Coast Pies’ stencilled onto the side. On closer inspection each object seemed to have been meticulously placed. It was not a random dumping. Nevertheless Snauwert still asks the question, what makes this art? He then suggests, that it is art

because it has been authorized by the institution—the Director has given her approval.

In light of this strategy, which stretches from Duchamp's urinal to Warhol's boxes and beyond, the difficult question for the museum today is 'what is to be excluded?' Can the collection of material that resembles a pile of 'junk' be a significant story of 'what is art?', and also provoke both social and aesthetic experiences for the visitor? This has become a critical question for the museum which today faces a new legitimacy crisis. The function of the museum is in part to tell the story of art. In so many museums around the world the story is told in some form of linear chronology. How do you fit material that resembles a pile of 'junk' into this neat narrative of progress and enlightenment? How do you authorize its entry into the 'sacred' place of civilization? Is it enough for the public to know that, because it has been approved by experts, authorized by the curator, and then displayed in a climate-controlled and guarded environment, that the 'junk' is not just part of the story of art, but also a significant event in our cultural context?

The heightened role of museological experts such as curator, critic and director raises new questions. How valid is their stamp of approval? Will it stick in the popular imaginary? Today the authority of the curator/museum director is measured by different and sometimes conflicting yardsticks. It might not be sufficient that she can point to her professional experience and historical knowledge of the evolution of artistic practices, and thereby demonstrate the ability to map and link together the complex of trajectories in the development of art. As the museum is increasingly subsumed in the new categories of the cultural industries, its relation to both leisure and the knowledge economy has complicated its own claims to historical legitimacy. Today the director might not only have to be an expert, but also an entertainer and entrepreneur.

Alongside these shifts in the social and political functions of the museum has been an expansion in the strategic use of museological spaces by artists. Throughout the twentieth century the

avant-garde looked at nineteenth-century museums with disgust, contempt and hostility. They were deemed pretentious, hollow, and treated as dead spaces, tombs for art. The avant-garde challenged the museum's aura of respectability, sacredness and exclusivity. If they were to engage with these spaces, it would not be on the museum's own terms. They did not accept that it was a neutral space that would allow for the objective display of art. They felt the frame of the museum had a negative effect on the capacity of the public to engage with all the social and aesthetic dimensions of art. Therefore, the challenge was to not only make stronger art, but also to transform the space of art.

Today a key component in the production of art is negotiation with the spaces in which art is experienced. Artists do not approach the museum as a temple, but as a platform, a malleable stage upon which the work is not only presented, but also within which it is completed. For this reason, the dynamics of space becomes a critical feature in contemporary artistic production. This has radical implications for the constitution of an artwork. At one level, it means that the work does not exist, or at least, does not complete itself, independently of its context. The imbrication of work and space also imposes restrictions on the work's mobility. What works in one setting will literally not work automatically in another. It will at least require some form of modification and adjustment. The self-contained, discrete masterpiece, which lends itself to display on any museum wall, has given way to 'definitively unfinished' works which exist in manifold versions and reconfigurations.

This kind of installation and site specific practice has radical implications for the function of the museum. At one level it wrecks traditional plans of display, acquisition and classification, but on another it may help to fulfil the new mission of creating an immersive experience for the public. Site specific practice puts new kinds of demands on the institution. The pressure on the budget shifts, from the pursuit of a masterpiece commodity that can be

purchased and presented at will, to the initiation of a temporal experience. In many instances, the final work of an artist does not result in an object—not even a piece of ‘junk’. Rather, it is ephemeral and conceptual: the creation of an atmosphere, the delineation of an ambience, the initiation of a set of relationships. A critical task of the contemporary museum is to evaluate whether these events are of sufficient significance to be housed within its framework. Once again the curator/director must legitimate the practice in terms of its cultural value. However, what proof will they have if they have no object? How will they demonstrate to the Board of Trustees, the politicians, the suspicious media, and the other members of the public who did not participate in these events? Will the comments of those who ‘were there’ be enough? Or will they need supplementary forms of proof of the cultural experience, such as the preliminary sketches, documentary footage and resultant objects?

After what Lucy Lippard called the ‘dematerialization of art’, we can see that the crisis of art was forcing artists not only to adopt nomadic strategies, but also to utilize the institution of art for the production and dissemination of the work. In many instances there was nothing that could be preserved by the institutions as a trace of the cultural experiences of art other than the video and photographic records. This has led Tsoutas to claim that whoever holds the camera now has the memory and commands the place of history. It is also interesting to note the heavy burden, and relocation of the auratic associations—as in Christo’s drawings—that is now placed on the supplementary forms of documentation. For those concerned about the loss of the finished object, they now overtake experience as the valued evidence of art.

In this peculiar transposition of value from the completed object to the preliminary or resultant traces of experience, there is a way in which the museum reclaims its original function and also neutralizes the radical attempt of the artist to convert it into a production house for significant experiences. Even if the museum

shows flexibility in its structures of display through its preparedness to knock down walls, put up new sound and sensorial aids, and thereby participate in the activation of space into a dynamic, living and mutating environment, there is still an underlying rationale that it displays, acquires and classifies the 'latest and greatest' examples of art. The aesthetic version of the rhetoric of 'world's best practice' is frequently the last conservative bastion attempting to impose a linear narrative upon the multiple trajectories and lines of affiliation which characterize the cultural production of global modernity.

'Small gestures in specific places'³—this could be the coda for the time when the place for art is on the move. Today the form of art bends to the circumstance, and the boundary with the everyday blurs. The placement of small gestures in specific places can at first glance be continuous with our daily stride, sight, breath, touch and reach. And yet it might also suggest that all these actions are more complex. What to do with such a seemingly useless gesture as Jorma Puranen's photographs of staged flags in the Finnish landscape, or Phillip George's digitally manipulated images of washed up Byzantine icons? I would suggest that these photographs require a form of interpretation that combines an understanding of both the formal construction of the image and its function as a performative intervention. As gestures they cause us to pause and reflect on the folds within geography and history. This art is 'asking' us to both look and think about other bodily, historical, social, or philosophical activities such as: walking with the history of the land, seeing the distance in a horizon, and breathing in the change in the wind.

The affirmative energy of art draws power from the combination of the roughness of specific places and the vulnerability of small gestures. In a poem about punk diva Benjamin Smoke, Patti Smith repeats a line which summons our attention, 'Can you hear Death singing. Can you hear Death singing.' Smith finds inspiration not just in the velvet incarnation of the divine tragic in the

voice of Maria Callas, but also in the jagged edges of Benjamin Smoke. In the stunning documentary by Jem Cohen, we can see that Smoke didn't sing about the abyss on his way back from the edge, but rather sang of his own crazy, delicate, desperate and courageous fall. Benjamin Smoke, the transvestite punk, found a lyric trash voice that came from the edges of a city whose cotton mills lay empty, crumbling like the ruins of an ancient unjust city. Smoke could be compared to Tom Waits—there is a hurt in both voices and a longing for unity with the beloved. But with Smoke, there was no sign that he would know when to leave and when to fight. Jem Cohen showed that the fatal crash was already everywhere in his music, just as the nicotine gasps of hope reverberated in the squeak of chord changes on rough guitars. Cohen's aesthetic was not tragic, but one that searched for redemption in the hollow and the crack. His way of being did not allow room for pity, just an opening for the sound of a love that is here and leaving.

What is the point of art if not to change our ways of seeing? I know that Ad Reinhardt warned against excessive expectations. He was right! You do have to be 'out of your mind' if you think that art can serve as a weapon for foreign policy. An installation of flags by Ross Sinclair, in the exhibition 'If I Ruled the World', may have political ambitions, but its scale is neither at the level of a resolution passed by the United Nations, nor the civic outburst of a local politician. Why would another Glasgow-based artist like Simon Starling bother to bring a battery that has been charged by the sun in Berlin to power a light in Iceland, which has its own seemingly boundless supply of thermal energy?⁴

The haunting gap between promises and realities that has ripped apart both modernism and socialism, is the subject that has preoccupied the Russian artist Ilya Kabakov. In a recent installation he staged a drama of historical dimensions through the construction of a corridor that joined two different windows.⁵ Let me recount the experience of walking along a corridor that in spatial terms performs both the fatal decay of socialist utopias and



7. ILYA KABAKOV, 'THE TWO WINDOWS', COURTESY NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA, OTTOWA.

the cultural feedback between folkloric and modernist codes. If T.J. Clark's survey of modernism's is a post apocalypse guide to the failed efforts to subvert capitalism's endless capacity to envelop human creativity within commodity relations,⁶ then Kabakov's corridor is a tour of the banality of micro-tragedies in architectural melancholia.

Your first visual sight in Kabakov's installation is the view out of a window frame. A modern window, two metres in length, with a stainless steel edge. Outside is a pleasant garden, a river and on the other side an impressive cluster of civic buildings ranging from

neo-gothic parliament buildings to modernist administrative office blocks. It is a clear day and this view of Ottawa will, in a short while, become more symbolic: it will be seen as a sign of the present. To be sure that this is the absolute present one can see traffic on the bridge and people strolling.

The gallery space opposite the window has been reduced to a narrow corridor. As you expect, the walls are pure white and the floorboards perfectly polished. The light fades towards the end of the corridor. Around the corner it is almost total darkness but a faint sound is heard. Music from another time and place. You proceed along the darkened corridor and the music is slowly getting stronger as the light diminishes.

Another corner appears before you. The end is well lit. You feel as if you have returned to the anonymous past of a life you never lived, but nevertheless you recognize it. The corridor belongs to a shabby apartment complex. The bottom third of the wall is painted a robust green and the top appears in nicotine off-white. Public housing is famous for its indifference to light. Corridors remain dark, not because there are secrets that need to be hidden, but out of the decay that trails the loss of care for the other. In these communal spaces the walls not only separate the public from the private, but also draw a boundary of social responsibility. The scuffmarks in this communal space not only signify the past traffic of occupants but also serve as an index of the multiple ways in which we fail each other. Sometimes the only trace of our comings and goings are the scratches that our furniture leave as we manoeuvre them around these narrow corridors.

At the end of this corridor there is light bulb hanging freely from the ceiling. There is a slight splash of paint on one side of the bulb. The light reveals a small enclave. Russian newspapers are partly covering the floor. A temporary bench made of dirty planks and large paint buckets serves as a barrier. The walls inside are in disarray, planks are leaning without reason, and it is unclear if someone is going to return to complete the job of decoration or whether the

task has been abandoned. An old radio is playing sentimental songs from the 1920s, maybe there was hope then, just as there must have been hope for those back then who saw the view onto Red Square, which is the view that lies at this end of the corridor.

The second window reveals a view of Moscow under the biting blue skies of a clear winter's day. The light reflecting off the snow-covered square and golden-domed buildings only heighten the stunning contrast between the dark interior and the bright exterior. As we walk away the difference between the two windows starts to rebound along the corridor. Back in the darkness of the corridor's mid-point, the music clings to your shoulders like a heavy and exhausted friend. You carry it along for a short distance around a corner and then it fades, drops off in the full light of the gallery. There only remains the bitter and unresolved sediment of revolutionary questions, which cannot be forgotten. These gnawing thoughts about failed experiments in art, politics and everyday life scratch into the illusions of progress.

The failures of the past, the despair in the experiments to construct new patterns of living with others, the poverty in the attempt to rethink the relationship between public and private, the haunting sense that these memories can never find a footing in the present, the struggle to find a bridge that links experience in one place with that in another, the untimeliness of nostalgia which always arrives without invitation and then alters the ambience of the night, the obligation to speak into a language which bears no history of your becoming and which threatens your sense of being, the exile from language itself which threatens you with the condemnation into silence or the disfigurement of exaggeration and understatement—all these dilemmas shuttle along the corridor between two windows. The significance of the installation revolves around the struggle to join them together. They can never make one continuous city; all the memories will never fold into one happy seamless experience. The two windows are like two poles on a map and the extremes of consciousness. Recognition of the

incommensurability between these positions does not dissolve the compulsion to discover some form of connection. In this work there is a compelling question which when uttered resembles a demand—how can you live in both places at once, since you can never entirely escape the other?

14. FINDING THE WAY HOME

Changes in contemporary art practices have stimulated a rethinking of the way knowledge is represented. Writing on art, as I have argued, is not a process of recording thought and creativity that has occurred elsewhere. It is in writing that creative practice and critical thinking occurs. There is now a wide range of scholars who have reflected on the ways knowledge is produced as it is translated in different media. They have asked the question: how is knowledge communicated? Or put another way, what knowledge do we have of the means for communication? The scientist Rupert Sheldrake has recognized that conventional science has few answers to these questions. He has noted that some of the great scientific discoveries are often made in more than one place, and at almost the same time. It appears as if, once one person passes an intellectual barrier, other people find it much easier to cross. The invention of photography is a case in which the moment and the author of invention are still in dispute. Is it possible that the idea occurred simultaneously? How do ideas pass from one person to the next?

Sheldrake has tried to examine these questions without dismissing them as examples of mere coincidence. Where other scientists have shrugged their shoulders, Sheldrake has argued that knowledge can be communicated without the direct

exchange of information; that contact in the realm of the conceptual is not dependent on either actual or digital transmission. Ideas can circulate in force fields without the sensorial forms of transmission but by means of what Sheldrake calls ‘morphic resonance’: ‘the influence of like upon like through or across space and time from the past...Each individual draws upon it and, in turn, contributes to it.’¹

On a more mundane level we can think about the curious ways we ‘know’ with our bodies and not just in our minds. Recently, medical scientists have noted similarities in the chemical reactions that occur in both the brain and the stomach. The ‘gut feeling’, which we might call instinct or a rumbling ulcer, is a common instance of how we can anticipate our response to an event before we have articulated our thoughts. This is why Walter Benjamin, the great melancholic philosopher, also knew that there is no better starting point for thinking than a good laugh. A deep chuckle, which starts in the guts, can shake the imagination.

Sheldrake has not only given serious thought to the intuitive powers of humans but noticed that domesticated animals like dogs, cats and horses have an even greater ability to sense changes.² Their ability to anticipate their owner’s homeward movements is so staggering that he can only explain this phenomenon through the concept of telepathy. Dogs are capable of registering the precise moment when an owner decides to return home, or even sense their actual arrival at a distant airport. Perhaps the most poetic and brilliant of Sheldrake’s example of telepathy between pets and their owners, was the use of pigeons by the British Navy.

Scientists have never fully explained the ability of birds to navigate across vast oceans when they complete their migration paths. Even more mysterious was the ability of carrier pigeons to deliver messages to specific ships and then return to the ‘home’ ship. This mission could be completed even when the two ships were in irregular and perpetual motion. The pigeons could make their way home just as safely when the ships were in combat and therefore

not following a routine path. Scientists have long puzzled over the pigeon's 'homing devices'.

Following on from Sheldrake, it could be suggested that 'homing devices' are akin to knowledge systems. Signals of home are not only picked up by the senses of sight, smell and hearing. If the pigeons were reliant purely on these senses then they would never be able to return home. There must be other ways of knowing the location of home, especially when the coordinates are not stable, that is, when 'home' is on the move. It is from this perspective that we can glimpse the deeper connections between knowledge and communication. Communication is not just a neutral medium—it is also the process of bringing forth the message, an active part of the message-making. Similarly, knowledge is not just information; it is also a process of being informed. Wisdom is found in people who do not just accumulate information, but find ways to keep in touch. Pigeons must have found ways to be in constant contact with these signals. Whether or not it is by telepathy or via some other undisclosed chapter in the atlas of gut feelings, the pigeons always make their way home.

Is it a coincidence that we name the most inventive, innovative and homely uses of language as pidgin? For people who have lost their homes, the displaced and the exiled, there is a secret hope that keeps pulsing, keeps them in touch with the world of home. People who are in violent or curious contact with others find the rub that exists between their languages. Most importantly, for people with a burning memory of the home that is far away, there is also the knowledge that language can communicate the sense of home. Communication becomes knowledge. Knowing comes from communicating. When everything around you is in flux, then the syntax of language must also be on the move. It must swerve, respond, pick up the signals that are swung and rattled in the vortex of turbulent fields.

In an earlier essay on this subject I proposed the concept of translation as a trope that may illuminate the general process of

cross-cultural communication in modernity.³ I distinguished the trope of translation with its emphasis on the creative act of transformation from the exclusivist and universalist models of translation that were dominant in literary studies and anthropology. Within certain literary circles the potential of communication between languages is restricted due to the belief of intransigent differences. Meanings formed in one language cannot be transported across to another, because of either the unavailability of semantic secrets or the fragility of specific chains of association. The prized symbols of a language and the survival of its intrinsic authenticity are thus seen as locked inside its own structures. In a number of anthropological studies on the dissemination of religious meanings across different language groups there is the belief that the meaning in one language is always available in another language because they all have access to a universal truth. These contrasting positions on the role of translation are extensions of longstanding philosophical debates between particularism and universalism.

Pidgin has no home in either particularism or universalism. We cannot explain the possibility of translation and mixture that is embodied by pidgin by reference to a body of thought that presupposes either exclusivity or an absolute hierarchy. Pidgin rejects the belief that all languages are but mere shadows of a universal body. This would mean that there is nothing new under the sun. It would imply that every new thought, every new experience, has already been expressed in the old universal language. Meaning between languages is not found because we are somehow capable of excavating from the common pool of knowledge that precedes and predates all human forms of communication. Knowledge did not arrive in a pure and universal form waiting for the gifted one to communicate it to the rest. The pristine pool of knowledge was not formed in advance of the messy and muddy act of communicating. God did not invent one fixed language; if there is a divine gift it is the fluid quality of knowing and communicating. Perhaps these illusions persist because there are no native speakers of pidgin.

There is never anyone left to defend the house, because it has already moved on. Those who tend to speak it fluently, with high degrees of accuracy, subtlety, and efficiency are often regarded as illiterate in their other language uses. Pidgin does not place much value on its own inventiveness. It is too busy moving to sit back and boast that it has found the definitive term for this or that. The playful association of opposites that occurs in pidgin is too slippery to submit to another authority. It will not concede its power of change to an instance of replay and repetition. Let us not forget that the dictionary definition of pidgin is a Chinese ‘corruption’ of the English term ‘business’.

Pidgin demonstrates an uncanny ability to find a sense of home in language even when coordinates are on the move and syntax is smashed. Pidgin reveals that the processes of knowing and communicating are in touch with ways of being in the world that exceed the rigid rules and purist conventions of closed language systems. Pidgin is a language that lays its meaning out in an open field. It is promiscuous. It is available for use and reuse. It has no strict definition. On the one hand, it can only make sense in the specific context of its use, but on the other this particularity does not imply that its members have deep lineage. To enter the game of pidgin one only has to admit to being open to change, rather than bound to particular rules. It plays with language as it breaks across different boundaries. It recognizes that language is a lens for sensing the world but also a lens that changes with every use. Pidgin does not stay bound to a particular place; it is the language that comes when two or more cultures meet at any border.

Pidgin comes from the need to know and communicate with other people. As we establish more and more forms of contact with other people our pidgin muscles expand. It is with our ‘gut feelings’ that we discern the bits of language that can find a home in these exchanges. It works best, that is, hits the target with speed and precision, when two or more like-minded people are in touch. They can get it despite being apart, separated by vast distances,

alone for long periods of time. Yet, when they meet in strange places, it is as if they have always travelled together. How do these people maintain contact? How do they develop affinities even when their cultures are so different? Scientists, anthropologists, semioticians and art historians still have no answer to these questions. What is undeniable is that artists find energy from the interruption to conventional forms of transmission and the transgression of cultural borders.⁴

In Bryndis Snaebjornsdottir's installation *Blami... blue yonder*, there is video footage of two aeroplanes that rise up to the skies and then descend to land.⁵ The ambient soundscape that accompanies this installation prompts a set of questions concerning the artist's claim to belong to a territory and her access to a specific body of cultural symbols. How far do you have to go to have gone away? Am I there in your place when I am in your thoughts? These questions reverberate across and beyond the conventional boundaries that would define the artist's place. They suggest that the artist does not simply dwell in a place but collaborates with place. The collaboration is more than hospitality; it is a small gesture in a specific place, which bridges different lives. Collaboration, in this spatial sense, is also metaphoric; it carries meaning across borders and gives energy to parts. These forms of spatial knowledge and metaphoric communication also provoke a different consideration on the concept of time and memory. Paul Carter is also alert to the confusion between remembering and restoration. He distinguishes the artistic reuse of buildings from their preservation by the 'heritage industry', by drawing on Kierkegaard's distinction 'between a knowledge conceived in terms of a return, an arrest of the flux that in effect renders history one vast tautology and a way of knowing that studies the forms of historical change, alive to their repeated coming into being.'⁶ To keep a culture alive, to find our way home, to know the time we are living in, it appears that we must also be in touch with the movement of ideas, or in Kierkegaard's aphorism, maintain 'courage for the flux'.



8. ROGER PALMER, 'PAOLO AND FRANCA,
'INTERNATIONAL WATERS II'. JOHN HANSARD
GALLERY, SOUTHAMPTON, ENGLAND, 2001.

15. THE RETURN TO INTERNATIONAL WATERS

If painting is the privileged object of art history, and contemporary art practice includes a diversity of other media and new practices, then how well suited are the techniques devised within the discipline of art history for interpreting the meaning of art? In the current field, where artists are engaged in post-studio practice, making work that responds to or engages with specific materials found in particular places, the work the art is doing needs to be understood within new frameworks.

Despite the numerous examples of artists from Giotto to Rothko, who made paintings specifically to be displayed in particular buildings, the life of modern paintings is rarely confined to an exclusive venue. The intention of the artist to see their work outside of their studio may be marked by ambivalence, but it is also central to the work's conception. One of the tasks of the art historian who is interested in the social context of art, is to follow this journey from conception to the places of display; the other is to read the content of the painting. Much of the sociological meaning of art has been explained in the form of an historical narrative. The social history of art has thus emphasized the development of art across time but underestimated its relationship to specific places.

When the artist is not making art in a studio but on a specific site, and when this work has no substantial presence beyond this

location, the conventional art historian is placed in a difficult position. They cannot wait to receive the work in an alienable form. They must either go onto the site or forever miss the experience of the art. There is no belated response, for the only time in which the art exists is the time in which it is made and displayed within a specific place. To understand the meaning of this art, historians and critics need to recognize the significance of spatial elements. The art historian is now compelled to track not just the history, but also the geography of the artwork.

It is from this perspective that I begin writing about Roger Palmer's installation at the former offices of the Union Castle shipping company in Southampton, England. It is also worth noting a question put to Palmer at the opening of his exhibition by a journalist: 'Is there any of your work in this exhibition?' Palmer replied: 'The exhibition is my work.' The confusion between the exhibiting of the artist's own work, and the exhibition as the work of the artist, underlined serious conceptual issues over what the boundaries are between aesthetic and everyday objects, in an exhibition that utilizes found material and is located outside of sanctioned museum spaces. The first point to stress is that the location of the exhibition in the city of Southampton and the building of Union Castle House were not arbitrary. In the guide to the exhibition Oliver Sumner and Roger Palmer outlined the history of the building in order to provide not just the background but also to establish its conceptual links to the exhibition:

Union-Castle House was built in 1847 on the site of the Gloucester Baths, a Georgian building which stood on a tree-lined promenade, known as the Platform. Originally the port customs house, Union-Castle House was established in 1902, soon after the 1900 merger of the Union and Castle shipping lines. Union-Castle House is currently under conversion into luxury apartments as part of the regeneration of the Southampton Docklands. As the function of the building changes, so this temporary exhibition provides a bridge between different eras in its history.

The location of the exhibition in this building is thus not just a neutral issue of spatial accommodation, but part of a complex network of aesthetic and political decisions that have defined a project whose locations link South Africa and England. Given that it is now commonplace for contemporary artists to work on sites outside of conventional galleries and to create works that do not resemble studio-based paintings and sculptures, it is important to define the new relationship between an artist and their work, in relation to broader questions of space and the everyday. At first glance the building can be seen as a frame that contains the artwork and enables the viewer to focus their attention on the boundary between the aesthetic and non-aesthetic matter. In Palmer's exhibition this boundary is porous. Palmer deliberately chose the building because of its past history, but by also deciding to mount his exhibition during the period it was being 'redeveloped', he was both avoiding the pitfalls of romanticizing the past, and opening an engagement with the changing architecture of the present. In contrast to other practices that require the viewer to scrutinize the sense of time and place that is staged in the work, Palmer's exhibition directs attention towards a sense of time and space that is both internal and external to the work itself. The loose boundary between the work in the exhibition and the history of the building encourages a dialogue with the surrounding urban setting, but it also invites contemplation on past technologies for travel to distant horizons.

The entrance to the port of Southampton may have the modest greeting of 'Welcome to the Gateway of the World', but for Palmer the interest is specifically with the link that was forged with South Africa. The more general links that were forged by colonialism and facilitated by sea travel are also inflected through a personal history. Palmer was born in neighbouring Portsmouth and his partner in South Africa. Over the last twenty years they have lived and worked in both the United Kingdom and South Africa. The exhibition in Southampton serves as the double to an earlier exhibition

in Cape Town. In both exhibitions there is the use of text and found objects. The textual links between the two exhibitions in Cape Town and Southampton are not confined to the politics of postcolonialism, nor is there an overriding code that predetermines the aesthetic value of the objects in each exhibition. Prevailing across these exhibitions, and even another paired exhibition between Scotland and New Zealand, is the fascination with the vessels of travel and the spaces between departure and arrival. The waters between nation states, and the ships that traverse them, become metaphors for the process of transition and transformation.

Union Castle was the shipping company that had a near monopoly over the route between Southampton and Cape Town. It was a key player in the imperial links that have been cut and then left to rot at the edge of the dock. For over a decade the building was empty, but now, like almost every other port city in the world, the area has been targeted for 'regeneration'. Across the road from the Union Castle building is the grand South Western Hotel building, formerly the Southampton Dock Railway Station, but now a complex of apartments with an active rail-line running through it which, once a month, services the Orient Express. Next door is Wilts & Dorset Bank, now occupied by Jeeves of Hampshire Valet Service, and in the former Pilgrim House—a memorial to the departure of the pilgrims to America from Southampton—is Burns International Security Services. Beneath the fifteenth-century Godshouse Gate and behind the French chapel of St Julien there is a reminder of the Genoese presence in the commercial centre of the city. Even the Lord Mayor was a foreigner! These old cities decline and recover. Strangers come from different directions bearing new duties and memories. Today traders are not so visible as asylum seekers. Corporate arrivals now provide the catalysts for 'regeneration', occupying buildings that have been left empty, oblivious of the history of past industries that slowly rust or hide under new coats of paint. The city now waits to be filled, but the fit is never

even. Gaps remain. Between the fragments of medieval walls, between meals in the mock Tudor pubs, between the pavements and the entrances of the Victorian hotels with their gardens paved over for the convenience of a car park, and along the broad one-way streets that lead to the dock, there is the constant reminder of the conflicting ambitions that seek to claim a space in the city's identity. Palmer's exhibition is a space in which the history of a city can be reconsidered, not by celebrating a particular moment in the past or making triumphal claims about the present, but in casting our gaze toward the horizons of other journeys. These horizons are initially announced in the long list of names of the Union Castle ships that left from Southampton.

Unlike the bitter-sweet melancholy of Alan Sekula's photo-narrative *Fish Story*, which documents the impact of containerization on global shipping throughout the 1990s, or Damien Hirst's decision to stage *Freeze*, the 1988 Degree Show of his Goldsmiths College contemporaries, in a former seamen's gym in London's docklands, Roger Palmer's work is neither attempting to represent a disappearing history, nor grabbing a derelict space in order to aestheticize the contradictions between art and industry. Palmer has chosen to work in a space whilst it is being 'regenerated' by the property developers. While most artists would prefer to work with a building in a state of ruin, Palmer accepts the work of the developer as part of the context with which his art must work. The old building can in many ways withstand the contrary ambitions of both the artist and the developer, and the significance of the occasion does not rest on competing claims over which is the most sympathetic to its original design. Palmer harbours little nostalgia for the specific history of the Union Castle shipping company. There is also a stoic countenance that meets the asymmetrical partitions of space and the circumcision of columns, or the tardy references to the past with a mahogany frame to echo a captain's office, and an inlaid compass that points in the wrong direction. Rather, the relics from the company's history, and the remains of the building, have been

incorporated into a metaphorical exploration on the way a sense of home is transported.

Palmer's use of materials in this exhibition continues with the fundamental principles of conceptual art. One of the objects of conceptual art was to break away from the institutionalized hierarchy of media and choice of material for the production of art. By rejecting the ideology that defined the superiority of painting in terms of visual autonomy, conceptual art also attempted to transform the relationship between art and the everyday by expanding the range of materials that could signify as artwork. The objects in this exhibition are almost banal, like an old receipt book, the only object that Palmer salvaged from the building during its derelict phase, or even the distinctly amateur water-colour drawings by Arthur Edward Cousens, a former shipping traffic officer who spent much of his free time sketching the local ships, that had been stored in the Southampton City Council Maritime Archive. The choice of materials in this exhibition is not governed by conventional aesthetic criteria, but by a desire to initiate a change in the way we think about the objects and consequences of travel. Palmer has not in any way attempted to stage an exhaustive history. One visitor complained to him that she had more artefacts stored in her attic than he had on display. Palmer was more concerned with how a few objects could trigger new messages once placed in a showroom flat, freshly fitted and painted but not yet occupied with furniture. These objects did create a haunting ambience. On the one hand they appear quite lonely, not crowded like they are normally in the rooms of heritage museums. On the other hand, the effect of spreading the objects apart was that they appeared like beacons issuing silent signals that urged the viewers to consider the contours of a landscape that was being submerged beneath the new tides of urban development. The sense of time that was staged in this space is therefore disjunctive. Past and present intertwined as in a movie, where the protagonist—perhaps it could be Peter Lorre—appears

as a taxi driver and then narrates stories to his passengers about his early adventures as an able-seaman.

A deep fatalism, beginning with the names of the last two ships, *Southampton Castle* and *Good Hope Castle*, runs through exhibition. Most of the earlier ships were named after British castles, proud claims about their impregnability. However, to end the line with a ship named after the bottom corner of Africa, the Cape of Good Hope, is a belated admission to the capriciousness of the elements which dominate the mythology of shipping, and an acknowledgement of the other pole in the colonial equation. The naming and mapping of colonial space often unconsciously expressed the desperation as well as the triumph of the colonizer. To journey across the sea is always both metaphorically and meteorologically an encounter with the unknown. Since ancient times, sailors have tried, through prayer and offerings, to appease rather than conquer the sea. Their own destiny is always uncertain. Palmer echoes this anxiety through the juxtaposition of the 'biography' of the *Good Hope Castle* and the *Southampton Castle* stencilled around the cornice spaces of the main entrance, and the positioning of two battered dinghies in the middle of the foyer. The text of this piece reads:

Good Hope Castle; 1965 launched at Wallsend-upon-Tyne to provide a mail service between Cape Town and Southampton in less than 12 days; 1973 severely damaged by fire near Ascension Island; 1978 sold to Costa Line and renamed *Paola C*; 1984 scrapped at Shanghai as *Paola*.
Southampton Castle; 1966 launched at Wallsend-upon-Tyne as the sister ship of *Good Hope Castle*; October 1977 made the last Union-Castle voyage between Cape Town and Southampton; 1978 sold to Costa Line and renamed *Franca C*; 1984 scrapped at Dalian as *Franca*.

The two battered dinghies that lay in the foyer, made of flaking

wood and worn out fibreglass, found in the scrap section of a sailing club, are also named *Paola* and *Franca*. The coincidence of naming may be staged but it also underlines the vulnerability of these mobile ‘castles’. The dinghies in their decrepit state echo the decline of the industry and the demise of the colonial order that they served. They also signify the pathos within the colonial spirit of commerce and exploration that sought redemption through the adoption of feminine names for their vessels. There is a pained sense of justice in the knowledge that these ships often, in contrast to the pomp and ceremony of their launching, end as scrap in remote places like Gin Drinker’s Bay, Kowloon. The geography that colonialism attempted to conquer eventually engulfs the very vessels of empire.

According to Peter Newell, a historian of the Union Castle ships, the atmosphere on board the ships was stiflingly English. The evidence of an exclusive English palate—‘Corned Beef Cakes, Tomato Soup, Roast Potatoes’ is still visible on the menu cards that were used to construct the model *R.M.S. Pretoria Castle* that Palmer has put on display. Apparently the décor was also classical Home Counties kitsch. No evidence of influence from the cultures in which the ship docked. Through a vinyl wall-text, Palmer informs us that between 1901 and 1961 the ‘Round Africa’ mail steamship service also stopped at Gibraltar, Tangier, Las Palmas, Majorca, Marseilles, Genoa, Naples, Tunis, Suez, Port Sudan, Aden, Mombasa, Zanzibar, Dar-es-Salaam, Beira, Lourenço, Marques, Durban, East London and Port Elizabeth. The shimmering differences of each horizon, the palpable contrast of every marketplace, the cacophony of languages all seems to be arrested by the interior of the ship. Inside you could feel that you never left home. Palmer plays with these contradictions in subtle ways. He paints the Union and Castle flags onto the wall inside the main living area in a way that they could be mistaken for the Cross of St George or the Cross of St Andrew. The ships, through their flags and moving architecture, symbolically stretch the boundary of

home as they travel between the mother country and the colonies. There is also a framed poster of a market scene that Palmer speculatively names as Zanzibar. It also shows one of the Union Castle ships arriving in the background. At first glance it appears that the ship and the colourful market scene are meant to stand as contrasts of two different worlds. Yet, in the midst of the market, there is one figure whose attention is not wrapped in his own labour but reciprocates the gaze of the viewer. A typical colonial agent, dressed in a white suit and under a broad felt hat, stands in the imperious centre of this vibrant exchange. The sparseness with which Palmer has filled his rooms is there to contrast with the teeming cultural flows through which those ships navigated, and the cluttered nostalgia of their décor. Palmer further illustrates the symbolic connections between these distant places with a text that is displayed on the wall of the room in which the model of *R.M.S. Pretoria Castle* is placed:

In 1947, the *Pretoria Castle* was launched by Mrs Issie Smuts, wife of Jan Smuts, the then Prime Minister of South Africa. As she refused to travel to Belfast for the ceremony, all the appropriate technology of the time had to be enlisted to ensure that 'Ouma' Smuts could nevertheless launch the largest liner yet built for the South African trade. And so it was arranged that she could press a button in the sitting room of the house in Irene, Transvaal, thereby triggering an electronic impulse that would be transmitted to Cape Town, whence it would be sent by radio to London and there re-transmitted by landline to Belfast. There the impulse would release a bottle of South African wine to smash against the bow of the new liner and also set in motion the launching mechanism. Thus shortly after 14.25 on 19 August 1947, and preceded by the playing of several Afrikaans folksongs, Mrs Smuts voice, relayed from South Africa, came clearly over the public address system at the

shipyard: 'I name this ship *Pretoria Castle*, May God protect the good ship *Pretoria Castle* and all who sail in her.' Mrs Smuts then made the pronouncement in Afrikaans and pressed the button.

In 1966 the *Pretoria Castle* was acquired by the South African Marine corporation (Safmarine). At a ceremony in Cape Town she was re-named *S. A. Oranje* by Mrs Betsy Vorwoerd, wife of Hendrik Verwoerd, the then prime minister of South Africa.

This text succinctly presents both the power of white authority in the colonial setting but also hints at the possibility of succession. The reluctance of Mrs Smuts to travel for the launching of the ship is but a minor indicator of a brutal and introverted world. Perhaps more ominous is the use of the new telecommunications, which not only relayed the message but also signalled imminent obsolescence of the ship even before it commenced its 'maiden' journey. Palmer teases out this double sense of connection and detachment, emergence and expiry, through the juxtaposition of a model of *R.M.S. Pretoria Castle* that was built from menu cards by a steward working on the ship. This quaint model and a single menu card dating from a later period when the same ship had been renamed *S.A. Oranje*, are both placed on plinths and encased in a shield of perspex plastic. By elevating and protecting these objects Palmer is not trying to make a claim over the status of these quasi-ethnographic objects, rather it is an ironic glance at the pretension of the aesthetic object in art and the blinkered vision of colonialism. The moral tone that is expressed against colonialism is tightly subdued, not due to Palmer being a naturally cautious person, but because his practice is to heighten the drama of a complex system through its subtle revelations in the details of daily life. The smug miniaturism of the model ship and the starchy provincialism of the menu card could be read as damning comments on the cultural introversion that colonialism constituted as a social norm.

Throughout the exhibition there is a constant attention to the way names change. The *Pretoria Castle* is sold and renamed *S. A. Oranje*, the *Good Hope Castle* becomes *Franca*. The explicit links between commerce and colonialism become less visible and re-written in the era of independence. Palmer has also pasted maps showing the changing names of African countries during decolonization. We have become more aware of the growing gap between political freedom and the substantive gains in cultural recognition and economic prosperity. Names of ships take on the ambition of their masters, but also, when reduced to scrap in foreign ports or even renamed after a stranger's girlfriend, can reveal the pathos of their destiny. Palmer's exhibition, which has tried to register these shifts in vision in its subtle attention to name changes, is also about measuring the different kinds of claims for being in the world. The story of sea travel, the way it has changed in the past few decades, can be thus glimpsed by the expressions of confidence or hope that were pinned to the ships' origin or destiny.

Space can never remain a blank stage upon which a single will can draft the narrative of action and response. Geography, like culture, thrives on difference. The ports must have been sirens in the ears of sailors, beckoning, dazzling, seducing. In the sailor's memories and fantasies, images from the past and snapshots from the present collide. Kavadias, a Greek poet who knew these routes from his time as a ship's pilot, wrote a series of poems called *The Southern Cross*, in which he merged images that included memories of a knife bought in the market, the rows of barber shops behind the shipping offices, and the minotaur in Picasso's paintings. These memories are triggered by the handling of small objects. The image of the knife offers more symbolic than real protection. It can be kept close to the body as you travel, but it is also a trace of the jagged contact with multiple cultures. In Kavadias' poems the sense of place is entangled, combining the yearning for home with the desire for the other.

Palmer has travelled many times between England and South Africa. Perhaps from these travels there is the recognition of the possibility of having a home in both places, but more importantly there is an abstract sense of openness that comes from recognizing the spaces between these ports. Palmer is deeply aware that the age of the big ship is over for human migration. The only people who travel in these vessels are paradoxically the privileged and the desperate. The rich cruise through the tropics and the poor try to land in the West by stealth and darkness. While the numbers of people on the move is now greater than it has been at any other point in history, the image of the ship can stand for the ambivalence of leaving and for the time away from home, a time in which the sentiments and expectations of being are more powerfully mixed with the dreams and hopes of becoming.

16. THE DOUBLE LANGUAGE OF MIMESIS

The advertisements, leaflets and posters for the Liverpool Biennial announced that it was composed of '350 artists' from '24 countries' at 61 sites and staged in '1 city'. This display of diversity cuts to the core of the growing tension between civic needs and curatorial ambitions in the age of globalization. In the past decade a number of new biennials have emerged across the world. Cities like Johannesburg, Istanbul and Kuangju now compete with the more traditional sites of Venice, São Paulo and Havana. It needs to be remembered that the founding of the Venice Biennale was as much motivated by the sense of trying to arrest the city's cultural and commercial decline as it was an open gesture of support to contemporary art. Similarly, we must question the relationship between the commencement of the Liverpool Biennial at the end of the twentieth century, and the current needs of non-metropolitan centres to re-position themselves in relation to the global flows of commerce and culture. Since the end of the Second World War and the decline of England's industrial base, Liverpool has witnessed a profound exit of capital and population. In the past decade, there has been a concerted effort to arrest this decline and to redefine the city's self image. This economic relationship between contemporary art and urban regeneration is seldom stated in explicit terms. However, in the case of the Liverpool Biennial, there was an

ambitious attempt to align the flows of capital with the staging of a global cultural event. These conflicting ambitions invariably produce a form of tension which, while being indexed by the display of diversity, is not resolved by it. My response to the curatorial theme of *Trace* will engage both the theoretical implications of the project and its location in the city of Liverpool. The structure of this chapter, while in dialogue with Tony Bond's introduction to the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition *Trace*, will also proceed by means of juxtaposed fragments.¹

Trace has a literary shadow which has crept between the body of the exhibition and the curatorial intent. The dual origin of the curator Tony Bond, born and educated in England but for many years a chief curator at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney, echoes the ambivalent link between culture and place that recurs throughout the structure of the exhibition. Bond's use of the concept of 'trace' was influenced by the Jewish German literary theorist Eric Auerbach, in particular his monumental work *Mimesis*.² Auerbach's work, which purports to be a 'study of the representation of reality in Western Literature', was, as Edward Said has stressed, only undertaken while he was living in exile in Istanbul.³ It was the absence of a comprehensive library and the distance from his 'authentic' subject that enabled Auerbach to consider such a vast topic. Distance from the original provided a new perspective and also spawned a new theoretical concept. Said suggested that the theory of mimesis partly emerged from the distance from and consequent attention to the gaps within the original. He further argued that the tensions between distance and proximity, absence and presence that underpin critical consciousness can also be reconfigured in terms of filiation and affiliation with place. The crisis of representation that is identified by the concept of mimesis, is also related to the particular relationship between the subject and their natal culture. It is pertinent to emphasize that migration often provokes the dismantling of perspectives which made the original home feel like the centre of

the world. Paradoxically, it could be argued that the curator's act of leaving England, and his incessant oscillation between departure and return, could be the thematic foundation of England's first official Biennial. The distance between England and Australia not only provided a new perspective on culture but also inspired new concepts for the 'grounding' of artistic practice.

Although the homelessness of the avant-garde is a story which has been told repeatedly in the history of contemporary art, the implications of this experience are rarely evident in the staging of art within dominant institutional spaces. While the context of contemporary art is increasingly transnational, or stubbornly operating at the level of the everyday, which could be seen as sub-national, the priorities and structures of the national have prevailed in the pavilions of both the old and new biennials of the world. The strategy of dispersing the art of *Trace* across various sites in Liverpool, without explicitly flagging the artist's national background, side-steps the limitations of national categories and allows new levels of resonance to occur between an artwork and its temporary location. However, this strategy suspends a deeper critique of the institutional space for contemporary art, as it avoids thinking about the place of art beyond national boundaries. In *Trace*, Bond rightly chose to drop any overt form of national labelling. However, the publicity surrounding the exhibition still maintained the conventions of an international event. The display of national flags not only represented the diverse origins of the participating artists, but also signalled the geo-political aspirations that underpin cultural events in the age of globalization.

The neo-classical rooms of civic galleries and white-cubed modernist spaces no longer mark the parameters for displaying contemporary art. Contemporary art is now found in a diversity of locations across most cities. Abandoned warehouses, bombed churches, empty department stores, temporarily vacant office spaces are not only favoured locations for artists' studios but are also increasingly used as venues for the display of art and locations

for site-specific works. The curator's identification of these diverse sites and the distribution of the biennial along these points can also serve as a mapping of the city's symbolic boundaries and a way of amplifying the artistic interventions into urban conditions. *Trace* incorporated an extensive range of sites from the many available spaces within a city like Liverpool. Bond dispersed the site of the Biennial beyond the walls of the Tate and introduced contemporary art into buildings like the Exchange Flags and the Oratory. These spaces within the city centre presented Bond with what he called a 'surplus of volume'. Unlike other curators who see the utilization of non-institutional spaces as a direct critique on the structures of mainstream art practice, Bond preferred a more conciliatory approach. The diversity of locations was projected as an extension of the available material with which artists could work. This strategy is part of an ongoing debate on the context of art. In the particular instance of the Liverpool Biennial it exposed the ambivalent relationship between contemporary art, the industrial past and the 'new world of order' of globalization.

The thematic ambition of *Trace* was to straddle a commonplace division between abstraction and realism. By focusing on the affect of art on the viewer, and in particular their sensory and visceral responses, Bond sought to reconfigure the links between conceptual practice and the role of social investigation in art. The curatorial strategy promised to expose links that have been present in the production but not the interpretation of contemporary art. But this also invites a new set of questions: 'Why did art discourse, in its famous divide between abstraction and realism, seek to keep the conceptual separate from the social?' 'How does an examination of the crisis of representation impact on our understanding of the role of the political and the process of embodiment?'

Trace extends an interest in the politics of the everyday that was also the focus point of the biennales in Sydney in 1998 and Melbourne in 1999. Unlike a much more publicized exhibition such as *Sensation* (1998 in London), which revelled in the affect

of aesthetic shock, *Trace* offered a more considered framework for examining the relationship between art with the politics of contemporary life. The aim was to excavate a history of the crisis of representation in art in order to consider developments in practice that stretch across the twentieth century and include artists from non-Western cultures. The uses of urban spaces outside of the gallery also stretched the symbolic range of interpretation and contextualization. Unlike some of the more formalist work which plays with the theme of the everyday in a hermetic way, and the artists in *Sensation* who tend to resolve their work in catchy one-liners, much of the work in *Trace* was deliberately left open, awaiting the participation of the viewer to achieve its full potential—for example, Claude Leveque's *War Games*, 1998, a video installation of tricks with balls. The work was dependent on the viewer stepping 'into it' and picking up the remaining balls.

CONCEPTUAL REBOUND: THEORY AND POLITICS

For the conceptual practice of art to find a more direct relationship with the experience of the political, the possibility of a form of bilingualism between the two discourses on theory and politics in art is needed. These discourses are conventionally developed in opposition to each other, operating with two different definitions of alienation. Conceptual practice draws heavily from linguistic theory. The alienation of the sign from its referent is, as Saussure claimed, the fundamental condition of language. The semantic split presents the potential for a plenitude of meaning and a destabilization of the dominant grounds for interpretation. Political interpretations of modern art are heavily influenced by Marxist theory. Alienation from the dominant lifeworld is utilized as both a critique of society and a representation of the modern artist's social position. Art historians routinely make reference to both kinds of alienation as an explanation of creativity. From the

Marxist perspective, alienation is both the dominant form of experience in modern society and, because the dominant is always pregnant with its contrary, the spur to future emancipation. However, it is difficult to grasp both the conceptual and political dimensions of alienation. At present there is no established theoretical framework that can refer to both levels of alienation. There is a strong body of literature that privileges either the conceptual or political basis of art but none that simultaneously addresses the links between the representation and the experience of alienation. If mimesis could be elevated to this level of critique and conjunction, it would be called upon to offer a third position in relation to the two dominant practices in contemporary art. It would need to identify the existence of a practical bilingualism which does not simply repeat the implicit value system which favours one practice over another. For example, we would need to redefine the vocabulary for the location of art, especially when it inhabits buildings and spaces which no longer conform to their original purpose and have 'fallen' into a state which the language of officialdom would define as 'dysfunctional'.

Some of the most powerful art of the post-war period draws upon the mnemonic function of materials and objects. Freed from a purely instrumental role, the artist's materials may be used both symbolically and formally. The effect is a multiplication of the metaphorical and sensual possibilities of art. Because every viewing produces a reading based on the memories, associations and sensations of the viewer, there is an indefinite delay in the foreclosure of meaning.⁴

Once the associative processes of meaning formation are liberated from a fixed panel of connection, the spaces and directions of interpretation are expanded. The field from which viewers can respond to an artwork can be as wide and as diverse as each

person's experience. This suggests that a response does not need to conform to any predetermined hierarchy to be valid. The viewers can approach art freely from their own position, drawing on the uncanny and unpredictable planes between the conscious and unconscious, but also in ideal circumstances, establishing bridges across the boundaries of personal and cultural differences. When there is no absolute ground upon which judgement is based, and each viewer's perspective is suddenly equally valid, then this opens the gates of evaluation. This is a freedom that is often referred to in recent art criticism, but one which the dominant institutions of art actively resist. They are conscious that differences of degree eventually become differences of kind, and this would ultimately undermine their own institutional authority. If the primary meaning of art is to be found by relating it to your own experiences, then this avoids the problem of difference. By reducing judgement to personal appreciation, it assumes that a person can discriminate the differences that separate him or her from others. However, as the discourse of aesthetic judgement has never confronted its own ethnic normative patterns, the possibilities of a genuine dialogue remain constrained. The incommensurability of different responses and judgements raises further questions about the possibilities of cultural translation and the tenability of a universally hierarchic value system. When the boundaries between art and life are finally dissolved, this produces more than just a conundrum for the connoisseurial politics of taste and distinction. The disavowal of absolute values for all the particular expressions of art and life is not necessarily the first step towards the deconstruction of existing boundaries, but more like an admission of a slothful relativism.

The curatorial strategy of recovering historical links between diverse forms of transgressive artistic practices, encounters a contradiction in terms of the difference in the political forces and the cultural fields of the early avant-garde and the current trends in contemporary art. The early modernist beliefs in a transformational politics, which was underpinned by strategies of inversion,

resistance, displacement and reintegration of the psycho-corporeal-socio matrix, shared the deeper values of modernity's ideology. The German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk identified this unacknowledged overlap by stressing the common goal of what he called 'mobilization'.⁵ Emancipation in the modern period always implied a new cultural surplus, a discovery of the lost inner unity, illumination of the 'true' order of things and the determination of the proper cosmology. The main obstacle to this balance between art and politics was the screen of the dominant culture. To smash through this screen was therefore a positive step towards the other side. While critical of the linear teleologies of progress, the avant-garde still upheld a politics of transformation through the advance towards an idealized other. Such beliefs and ambitions are not so evident in contemporary practice. What are the social goals that now direct the concept of mimesis? In what sense does a break with the past now bear the promise of a new future? What other forms of knowledge are being outlined in the reactions against academicism? The fundamental question which haunts the link between contemporary practice and the founding principles of the avant-garde is not the direction, but the very sustainability in the view of progress. While being opposed to the distortions and obfuscations of the dominant culture, the avant-garde embraced anti-realist forms and spontaneous expressions of subjectivity, which served as both a critique of bourgeois culture and proved to be a more direct embodiment of the efficiency and maximizing drives of modern culture. Such faith in the progressivist spirit of modernity was not so evident in the contemporary art of the late 1990s.

The burden of the curatorial strategy in *Trace* is most heavily placed on photography. Photography's dual function as a document of a real presence in space and a simulation of a moment in time which is absent from the image, tests the critical boundaries that Bond attributes to the concept of mimesis. The oscillation between absence and presence is particularly loaded in relation to documentary photography. Bond's claims swing between the



9. DORIS SALCEDO, UNTITLED, 1998. CHAP THE
DOUBLE LANGUAGE OF MIMESIS.

opposing directions of the anthropological salvation paradigm and the indexical presence of conceptualism. Of Klopheus's photographs, he notes that her method of printing, which emphasises the chemical trace of light, transforms the images into 'relics of an ephemeral reality', while also suggesting that her intention was to document the streets of Liverpool during a time of renewal.⁶ In both cases the burden of photography is to record something that is in flux and to draw attention to elements that habitual consciousness would miss. Photography is given the double duty of reflecting and provoking the conscious and unconscious processes of memory. However, this presumes that public consciousness is still bound by a blasé attitude and overwhelmed by the plenitude of visual stimuli. Hence the position of the artist is not only witness but also, as in the Greek sense of witness, a martyr who takes the signs of a culture and introjects them into

the body of their practice in order to vitalize the empathic processes in society. In the artist's statement that accompanied *Untitled*, 1998, in the exhibition *Trace*, Doris Salcedo supports this role:

The images left behind by a violent act in these places are sometimes evident and sometimes imperceptible, in any case, indelible. My task is to transform these traces into relics that enable us to acknowledge other people's experiences as our own, as collective experiences.⁷

From this perspective it is assumed that art can fulfil certain social and therapeutic functions that are missing in the dominant culture. Art is expected to offer the trace of a standard against which the absence of justice is acknowledgeable and enable individuals to complete the process of empathy, not only within their own imagination, but also on a collective basis. According to Bond, the power of certain documentary photography is also analogous to the religious quality of the relic. How is the excess symbolic resonance that distinguishes a relic from an ordinary object regenerated by the materiality of a photograph? In a tone that is redolent of writings on photography by John Berger and Roland Barthes, Bond answers the question on photography's ability to elicit deep memories and reveal private aspects of one's character by relating it to the process of interweaving that occurs when we stare at an image of the beloved. In such moments, the photograph is both a relic of the past and, as it bears witness to the present, it is suffused with new energy. 'A photograph is literally touched by events of a moment and altered to form the permanent record of its circumstance.'⁸ The photograph enables us to know and remember better. It is a token which can break the alienation of a solitary life that floats without trace and is otherwise given no measure or indication of value by prevailing standards. However, for art to provide an insight into how empathy can transform the general conditions

of alienation and forgetfulness, another critical perspective needs to be active in our 'ways of seeing', and new rituals need to be activated to consolidate the meanings that are generated in the collective experience of art.

The methodology of a number of artists in *Trace* highlights the role of collaboration. Collaboration reaches its most exquisite forms when the very boundary between art and life is blurred and displaced. For at this juncture, the practices of living not only offer a suitable subject to be represented in the work of art, but also a model for making art. When artists draw from the everyday, then the space between themselves and their subject begins to assume levels of intimacy and attachment that are fundamentally different to the more remote and oppositional stances of earlier phases of the avant-garde. Membership of a group, which is assumed or earned through 'rites of passage', carries with it rights and responsibilities about disclosure. An artist in such circumstances is not just a neutral witness but is embedded in a complex network of relationships and obligations. In such collaborative practices there is no aloof outsider position. Objectivity does not come from seeing things from a distance, but rather emerges out of an oscillating relationship of mutual respect and intelligibility.

URBAN DREAMING

The example of the collaboration between Stephen Willats and Pat Purdy in *Pat Purdy and the Glue Sniffers Camp*, 1981, reveals methods that draw from sociological and anthropological techniques.

In 1980 Stephen Willats returned from Berlin where he had been working for two years to revisit The Avondale Housing estate at Hayes in West London. Here he met one of the occupants, Pat Purdy. Together they initiated a new strategy for Stephen's practice. His work with these sites

had always entailed tracing social systems and documenting people's attempts to escape the determinism of a planned environment. For six years prior to this Stephen had been photographing the working or living environment of ordinary people often focusing on objects that they collected or placed on their desk. These personal effects were presented as the effort of an individual to differentiate their personal spaces and tell their own stories. Stephen's previous application of this research took the form of graphic structures incorporating photographs and texts often by his 'collaborators'. Pat Purdy pointed out that instead of photographing objects he could apply them directly and that the text could be written directly and unedited onto the design.⁹

This collaborative process not only blurs the question of authorship but also displaces the location of the creative act. It is not in the studio that the artist makes his or her discovery; rather, as Bond noted, the form and content of the work is identified while in conversation with the subject in their own space. Aesthetic effects in the resulting work are here closely bound with the ethical relationships that are established in the processes of the collaboration. Thus the value of the art work needs to be measured by non-aesthetic categories such as the documentation of the exchange that occurs in the social relationship between the artist and their subject.

The account of the site of the collaboration between Willats and Purdy demonstrates the need for a different language for representing some practices of urban living. To the conventional eye, the monumental housing estates surrounded by large tracts of wasteland on the peripheries of large cities represent the most cold and inhospitable forms of shelter. However, Willats' project is about how these 'alien' spaces are experienced as homely places. This form of personal attachment and spatial transformation is particularly evident when Pat Purdy talks about the 'lurky place' where

the kids would seek refuge. Small camps in obscure corners of the estates were places where kids went to hang out and sniff glue. The pleasure of 'losing it' by inhaling fumes from heated glue was as much an expression of the need to find a dreaming space as it was a gesture of defiance against the intolerable condition of entrapment within the grid of domestic living. This tension in the lurky place is not as Bond describes it, 'the centre of a dysfunctional ritual of fragmentation',¹⁰ but an example of a parafunctional space. This term refers to zones in which creative, informal and unintended uses overtake the officially designated functions. In parafunctional spaces, social life is not simply abandoned or wasted, rather it continues in ambiguous and unconventional ways. Architectural theorists Ignasi de Sola-Morales Rubio, Andrea Kahn and Leon Van Schaik have also recently proposed similar terms for identifying the 'vague' forms of use and the aleatory needs of cities. The identity of the lurky place, like parafunctional places, cannot be evoked in purely negative values that are informed by a different class sensibility. The lurky place has an indeterminate location. It does not fit within the conventional polarities that demarcate the boundaries of home, leisure, education and work. The lurky place is an example of an in-between place, whose original function and subsequent uses are not in a state of accord, but re-routed around the needs of people who were meant to confine their lives within more restricted boundaries. Within their subtle and minor acts of transgression there is a glimpse into a form of urban dreaming that reveals the inhuman gaps in town planning and contradicts the boastful visions of civic leaders.

Throughout the modern period, cities have been a constant site of fascination for artists, and the vision of city life provided by artists has in turn inspired architects and urbanists. Artists have not just documented city life, but also embodied the urban spirit of modernity. The history of modern art can be plotted beside the combined history of explosive urban growth and industrialization.

While artists have responded to the promises of technological advances and cosmopolitan forms of existence, as well as the dark underbelly of exploitation and pollution, the belief in the historical progress of urban life has until recently rarely been questioned. In the early films of Vertov, Eisenstein, Guttman and Lang, as well as the paintings and sculptures by the futurists and constructivists, there was a vision that not only articulated an ambivalent view of aspects of city life, but also upheld the urban form as a space of hope and transformation. This faith seems to have been violently destroyed by the end of the twentieth century. Films like *Bladerunner* and *Koyaanisquatsi* capture the deeper despair that lurks within the ruins of the industrial city. The city is now the stage for what Mike Davis calls the new disaster-apocalypse genre.¹¹ Contemporary artists like Gordon Matta Clark, Dan Graham and Vito Acconci have also further investigated the abuses of public space, the distortions of urban culture and the destructive relationship between architecture and the body. Perhaps one of the most powerful statements on the limits of the modernist urban vision can be found in the works of the architects Andrea Kahn and Ignasi de Sola-Morales who, in an attempt to define the complexity of meanings embedded within the abandoned spaces of industrial cities, produced terms like 'Not-Urban Site' and 'Terrain Vague'. Their concern was neither to redevelop nor to preserve these 'empty' sites but to understand how the diverse and often unacknowledged and parafunctional uses that occur in these spaces reveal critical facets of the city's multi-layered political and cultural histories. An examination of the traces of cultural life in the neglected spaces of a city is a task that remains incomplete in the history of modernity.

The former industrial cities in north-western England, which once formed the global centre of the industrial revolution but now have been bypassed by successive waves of capitalist development, are now prime locations of parafunctional spaces. According to the urban sociologist Anthony King, Liverpool was once the biggest

slave port in the world, and in the 1850s more than four-fifths of the world's manufactured goods were exported from there.¹² Vast docks, warehouses and office blocks, like the countless industrial spaces in other Western cities, have been practically empty since the Second World War. Before the developers turned most of these spaces into apartments for New York-style loft living, these were the buildings in which artists worked, lived and displayed their work. In contrast to the suburban modalities that attracted the middle classes, artists tended to locate their studios in spaces that were amongst the ruins of the industrial and civic centre. These locations, although often in the city centre, were also places against which the city had turned its back. Neglected, abandoned or in partial use, they became laboratories for alternative statements on urban life. The commodification of this critical practice into an after-hours lifestyle took less than one generation. The fact that the work of many young British artists has a 'grunge' look is no coincidence. It is also no coincidence that these artworks find their ultimate home in the sterile warehouse-style apartments.



10. PETER LYSSIOTIS, 'CITIES TO DUST, 2001. FROM THE SERIES TALL TALES (BUT TRUE).

17. TRACES LEFT IN CITIES

This chapter consists of anecdotes and observations on films, photographs and urban theories of spaces in modern cities that are conventionally perceived as abandoned, empty or derelict. Such spaces exist in almost every city that expanded during the phase of industrialization and is now transformed by the counter forces of deindustrialization. Despite the common labelling of these spaces as ‘wasteland’, I will argue that they also enable a diverse range of activities and forms that are often hidden from public view. The significance of these spaces has begun to surface. Museums, architects and developers are all in pursuit of sites with ambiguous social histories. Robert Harbison goes as far as interpreting these sites as if they were on a continuum with classical ruins.¹ My aim is not to provide a new historical account of the legacy of the industrial city, but to gather impressions from a number of locations that demonstrate the possibilities that lurk within this contradictory topography.

To facilitate a closer understanding of the social practices that exist in these ‘liminal spaces’, and to break out of the negative typology within which these spaces are represented in current urban discourse, I propose to describe them as ‘parafunctional’.

My original observations were made while living in Manchester. The identification of parafunctional spaces in the city in which the

'industrial revolution' was 'born' is not part of an organic narrative on the birth and death cycle of Manchester. The lesson from living in Manchester was broader. It involved a rethinking of the fundamental ways in which we categorize urban spaces. The prevailing narratives of urban apocalypse or redemption, and the concepts of centre and periphery, seem to be inadequate for representing the parafunctional spaces in Manchester.

The abandonment of major buildings and implosion of civic spaces in many industrial cities during the post-war period left a nesting space for new urban dreamings. Discarded objects and the refuse of an earlier mode of production gathered in these sites. From the early 1960s, artists began to explore these parafunctional spaces as studio spaces and to incorporate the relics and rubbish found on these sites as the new materials for their artistic practice. In the process, they suggested a counter-narrative for urban life and expanded the field of artistic practice. While much of the art made out of industrial junk has now been sanctified as the precious icons of modernism, a similar trajectory is also evident in relation to studio spaces. The haunted, rusted and decayed inner city warehouses—which were previously the studio spaces of artists—have now been refurbished as sterile, centrally heated and glamorous loft apartments. In the context of global city—with all its rhetoric of plenitude and simultaneity—it would be perverse to celebrate parafunctional spaces as yet another dimension of urban creativity or the locus for the cultural industry. Parafunctional spaces have been already been functionalized as either the privileged locations for counter-cultural activity, or the modern incarnation of the romantic ruin. My attention to parafunctional spaces is to offer a stimulus to the discourse on urban entropy and decay, and highlight the contradictory relationships between the old and the new, the abandoned and the developed, the imagined and the real.

THE DOVES FLY

As I was driving home from Tullamarine airport in Melbourne, my attention was arrested by an interview on the independent radio station 3 RRR. I decided to pull up on the hard shoulder of the new tollway. The DJ asked the lead singer from a touring band why it was that in the north of England, especially in grim and hard cities like Manchester, there were so many bands that produced such strong and lyrical music. The singer replied:

Well, we have just played in Sydney, and one evening, we were taken to a park by the edge of the harbour, which had magnificent views of the opera house and bridge. It was a beautiful balmy night, and slowly the park started to fill with people, they were carrying baskets of food and wine. As dusk fell, a huge screen emerged from the harbour, and a film was projected on to it. Now, if we had places like this in Manchester, maybe, we wouldn't need to make music. For us, music is our way of reaching out to other worlds.

Back in Manchester, as they say, 'the rain rained'. On a howling and blustering bonfire night I took a mini-cab to the Ritz ballroom. The band that I heard on Melbourne radio, 'The Doves', was performing on their home ground. As we approached the intersection with Whitworth Street, I disingenuously asked the driver about some building works across the road.

Oh that is an old nightclub, which was closed down because of too many drug problems. Now it is being turned into apartments. You know when I came to Manchester in 1962 and we would get drunk in town, I would say to my mates, 'Let's go and kip down in your warehouse.' They were always afraid to do this because it was against the law to sleep in the town. Now some

Jewish guy has bought all these old warehouses and is building expensive apartments everywhere.

The ‘Hacienda’, home of ‘Joy Division’ and Manchester techno sound, which took its name after the legendary call for a new cultural home by the Situationists, was indeed being converted into apartments. The developers, conscious of the aura that surrounded this club, decided to auction off the materials that would normally end up in a ‘skip’. With no Duchampian irony intended, collectors purchased the remaining toilet bowls and coat racks. The media, thinking that this was an auspicious moment in popular culture, showered the funeral with free publicity.

Outside of the Ritz, scalpers tried to flog the last remaining tickets. Things must have been desperate, as one even politely opened the taxi door for me and, under the cover of his umbrella, offered me a good price. As the gig was about to begin a film was projected onto a screen behind the stage. It was a sort of allegory about three young guys leaving the city to arrange a deal with a business man in a secluded country lane—like selling their soul to the devil. The lead singer then greeted the crowd with a self-deprecating smile for such excessive ‘artiness’: ‘Don’t ask us what that is all about, we just made it.’ He turned to his drummer to release the beat, who shrugged his shoulders because the computer that had stored the sampled sounds was out. Again he apologised. ‘Back in five.’

On their return the guitars swirled and the young men near the stage leapt to the pogo dance. The sprung dance floor, built long before the age of amplified music, was responding by offering a slight lift. Images of surfing projected on the screen complemented the musical dream of reaching out to another world.

FALLOWFIELDS

In an essay on the strict regimes of Chinese agriculture, the contemporary French philosopher Michel Serres introduces a reverie on

his father's peasant roots and then speculates on the spaces between culture and nature as a reflection of the dialectic between order and disorder. Suggesting that suffocation is the result when the former totally subordinates the latter, it is of course a parable on the discontent of the city.

I was aware that our wisdom lay in that little bushy grove, that humid low tract through which we wade awkwardly or that abandoned field with weeds and that little thicket of low bushes, all these deserted fields. I can breathe freely and fully in a field because it is bordered by brushwood full of quarrelling birds, because that field lies at the outskirts of a forest, marked by deserted areas, by spaces left fallow, badly tilled. Our wisdom consists of this negation, this disorder, this lack of culture. How can one breathe in a field without boundaries surrounded by other fields? How can any motion be possible when there are only positive affirmations, when the entire land is in the grasp of reason?²

PHANTOM SEA

In the weekend supplement of a national newspaper appears a photo essay on Nukus, capital of Karakalpakstan. According to the journalist, who never hides his disgust of the surrounding devastation:

The Karakalpaks can boast the Biggest Ecological Disaster in the World. Nothing else comes close to the majesty of this disaster. Not just the biggest, but the fastest. Organised and executed with the precipitate callousness, greed and sheer eye-bulging stupidity that only hands-on Communism can muster. They've managed to drain the Aral Sea, the fourth biggest inland lump of water on the globe, and they've done it in 20 years.³

The conversion of the surrounding land into cotton farming and the damming of rivers to feed this thirsty mono crop, has turned the fertile valleys and the vast sea into a desert. The inland harbour city of Muynak is now pictured as marooned in sand. The vision of despair in the portraits of its inhabitants is heightened by the images of rusting boats tilting on mounds of weeds. One of the few signs of resilience is the re-use of metal plates, wrenched from the ship's hulks, to make defensive stockades for the houses against the encroaching desert. The cracked pavements, which were once elegant promenades that ran along the edge of a sea, are now like ghost lines. The sea has vanished from the horizon. Muynak is now 100km from the sea. The ships, now stripped to appear like the ribs on a carcass of vulture picked buffalo, and the weed-filled pavements are a haunting illustration of the consequences of industrialized farming.

ARTHRITIS IN THE JOINTS

Jim Jarmusch's film *Ghost Dog*, 2000, is located in a city that is identified only by the ironic slogan 'The Industrial State' that appears on the hapless number-plates of various stolen cars. The film opens with the view of a solitary pigeon flying high in the sky. After a few beats of its wings the perspective swaps. We see the city beneath, as if from the eye of a pigeon. In this 'Industrial State' there is no smoke that filters earth and sky. The vision is as clear as the structures of a grid city. A few cars seem to be commuting between the patches of green, brown and grey. Little sign of labour or pollution. As the camera approaches ground level the city emerges in a state of semi-abandonment. Factories seem quiet. Buildings slowly crumbling. Signs just hanging and peeling. Mansions are on the market. The pigeon arrives to deliver its message to a pair of gangsters. They should have received their pension by now. The ornaments in their apartment

seem more vulnerable than the pigeon. Gilded kitsch fading. The gangsters are already in the arthritic phase. Climbing the stairs to make a hit is almost out of the question. Unlike their anonymous assassin they are unsure of their place in the crossover from one hierarchy to the next.

Throughout the film the pigeons deliver messages from 'Ghostdog', an assassin who has dedicated himself to the art of Zen, to an unwitting master. The film repeatedly demonstrates relationships in which authority is inverted or undermined. The pigeon as messenger is also a symbol of the lonely freedom that comes with redundancy. Racing pigeons was once the favoured hobby among the world's first proletarians in the industrial villages and towns of northern England. Transported to America, this ritualised dreaming space became perched onto the residential lofts in the rustbelt cities. Marlon Brando searched for his soul while speaking to his pigeons in Elia Kazan's *On the Waterfront*, 1954. In those days there was still work to be done on the docks. The destiny of 'Ghostdog', like its generic city, is more ragged. Even his victims concede the cost of change:

'you have to hand it to this Ghostdog, he is taking us out
the old way'

'nothing stays the same anymore, everything changes'

CROFTS

In Manchester, England, grassy fields can be found in and near the city centre. Occasionally, on the edge of these fields, there are the remnants of buildings. With the decline of commercial activity and the aerial bombardment in the Second World War, the city began to lose control over the uses of its own spaces. Grassy fields began to emerge and multiply. At times these fields are occupied as car parks, on other occasions they resemble 'commons'. The ecodiversity in these brownfields is now said to exceed that of whole of

the city. When the grassy field is situated between other urban sites of activity, diagonal lines of trodden paths reveal a neighbourhood shortcut. These unplanned, weed-filled, and unregulated fields became known as 'crofts'. Just as the manufacturing plants had the anachronistic pastoral name of 'mills', the word 'crofts' has a paradoxical etymology. The term 'crofts' echoes the Scottish reference to agricultural land that was passed by right of inheritance but without the claim of ownership. Although the word has a pre-industrial trace, the association of 'crofts' is inextricably linked with the decline of the industrial age. 'Crofts', in Manchester, refers to a place 'where something once stood, and has been pulled down or cleared.' The association with coercion and resistance is embedded in the reference to the Scottish history of highland clearances; however, with time, the 'crofts' in Manchester became an ambiguous social place:

kids learnt to play football on the crofts. It was a place where you could walk the dog. They were a bit like a common, you could get a bit of 'nookie' there if you were lucky. There was one behind the University where the 'meths' lived. I often saw them there by a fire sharing a demi-john and doing a jig.⁴

The presence of 'crofts' has a larger significance. Despite the conventional perception that these places have no character, and that people would sooner pass by than stop to notice, these fields also reveal some of the historical blind spots in the urban landscape. They are like boundary markers in the official zones of use and occupation. They exist between the commercial, recreational and residential zones of the city. These 'crofts' were never claimed as official local parks; they were simply strips of land that were caught in the process of waiting, or the parts of land which urban planners did not know how to 'fill'. In that sense they resemble voids, but they never remain purely empty.

THE TYRANNY OF FUNCTION

In the lead-up period to the privatization of British Rail there was a significant change that was introduced around the waiting rooms and platforms of stations across the country. The seats were changed. Flat benches were replaced with new plastic individual seats. This was not a mere cosmetic change. It was a deliberate attempt to prevent homeless people from sleeping on benches in public spaces at a time when these assets were 'for sale'. Not only was more space being fragmented into commercial franchises and waiting rooms now converted into hamburger restaurants, but the right to use these public spaces was confined to consumers.

In New York the civic authorities tried to have this process of commercializing public space and its attendant regime of private consumption endorsed by law. However, Mayor Koch's attempt to displace homeless people from Grand Central Terminal was defeated at the Supreme Court. In his defence Koch repeated a phrase that contained a specific theory of urbanism: 'You can't stay here unless you are here for transportation.'⁵

What underpins the aggressive reclamation of space is the fear that it might become parafunctional. Space should, from this perspective, only function according to the objectives of the commissioned designs. Behind these claims about the correct uses of waiting rooms, the rights of resting and the legitimate codes of interaction is the totalitarian ambition to regulate social spaces. The designation of function in exclusive terms and the excessive reaction expressed by Koch are symptomatic of fear of contamination and ambiguity. The parafunctional uses of spaces reveal the instability in objectives of design processes and threaten to confuse the monofunctional designation of urban spaces. Flat benches in public spaces are always potentially parafunctional as they can be used in ways that disrupt the cosy deals between civic authorities and corporate franchises.

RETURN TO THE PRAIRIE

Detroit, known as Motor City, has declined into such a state of ruin that the creeping gaps and tumbling rubble are outstripping the rate of urban development. In the 1990s entropy was exceeding development in the Detroit landscape. Like a modern version of a classical ruin, this city was becoming more famous for its past. Landmark buildings that served as key reference points have now disappeared from view. Visitors struggle to find places because locals continue to give directions in relation to where something used to be. As Geoff Dyer noted, the Michigan Central Railroad Station is symptomatic of the gaps that exist between intended utility and current use: 'It was built in 1913, a huge neo-classical edifice, 15 or 16 storeys high, a terminus whose function has since been terminated. Now it stands surrounded by its own silence.'⁶

In the mid-nineteenth century, Detroit was one of the exemplars of the modern industrial city. Buildings that were once a showcase of modern engineering and architecture are now empty and boarded up to exclude squatters. Such is the level of dereliction and abandonment throughout the city that weeds and trees are once again overtaking the urban landscape. The popular joke about Detroit is that it is likely to become the first industrial city to return to the prairie. The decline is so devastating that even the architectural ruins, photographed by Camilo José Vergara, are disappearing from view. He would like to see the city preserved in its current state as a monument to the indifference, or rather the calculated redlining of old urban centres by American capitalism. Vergara's photographs reveal the ways in which cold winters, half-optimistic developers and guerrilla artists conspired to redefine the life of the city.⁷ The city is a powerful symbol of the impermanence of the industrial revolution and the rootlessness of capital. The irony is compounded when we consider the attitude that justified 'white flight', which, according to Joel Garreau's gleeful account of the 'edge cities', is premised on the mass production of the car:

As soon as we had a choice—the moment the Industrial Age produced a machine that would allow us to live a respectable distance from the poisonous environs we associated with toil—we jumped at the opportunity.⁸

As the labour force has been displaced by new forms of mechanization in the few remaining car plants, so too has the music that was once emblematic of the soul of the city. Motown sound has given way to techno. Dance music has moved to the new electronic sounds of techno which, like the motown sound, was pioneered by the underclass black men of Detroit. Techno marks the transition from the thumping rhythm of repetitive machine actions to the ghostly reverberations that echo across the abandoned factories. Repetition of beat was pumped to a maximum, melody distorted into a depersonalized voice section, and rhythms sampled from sources that barely echo back their place. It was a music that took the negativity of its social space as a starting point, resulting in a distinctive ‘Detroit’ sound that DJ Derrick May describes as the result of ‘George Clinton and Kraftwerk trapped in an elevator’.⁹ For the last third of the twentieth century, it was only music that was spoke into and found its way out of this desolation. MC5 (Motor City Five), another band formed in Detroit in 1964, illustrates the point. Along with their neighbours The Stooges, they provided a soundtrack of the city’s fading history and desperate punk claim to the present. Their sound included a mix of Motown, soul, free jazz, rhythm and blues and 1950s’ rock. The music was dynamite; meanwhile the motors in the city slowly gathered rust.

DREAMS CONVENED AMIDST INDUSTRIAL RUINS

Dream spaces can never be anticipated. For a place to be really home it needs in some degree to reflect back to us our own unique relationships to the here and now. The functionality of a space

must swerve in line with the forces of individual use. The angle of this swerve and the subjects it takes on its course is, as Walter Benjamin noted, unpredictable. Benjamin was unique amongst the Marxist critics in his ability to perceive the hidden energies that lurked within the constant shuttling relationship between the past and the present, and he saw evidence of this in the fascination with outmoded buildings. In objects whose utility had been rendered redundant, and even in the most modern forms of architecture that have explicitly attempted to break with the past, Benjamin found traces that both suggested an unspoken link with the past and carried an unintended radical potential. In his famously incomplete *Arcades Project* Benjamin remarked:

constructions in which the expert recognizes anticipations of contemporary building fashions impress the alert but architecturally unschooled sense not at all as anticipatory but as distinctly old-fashioned and dream like.¹⁰

Old buildings and structures which still function as railroad stations and bridges can often provide the framework around which other social processes cluster, at times parasitic on the body of architecture, in other instances breathing sweet social life on the hard steel of engineering. Buildings need to be fixed to the ground, but their meanings must also yield to the turbulent patterns of living. 'More than its utilitarian and technocratic transparency, it is the opaque ambivalence of its oddities that makes the city liveable.'¹¹ With this credo Michel de Certeau was able to link Benjamin's critical modality to the uncanny histories that lurked between the ruins of the industrial landscape and the contemporary process of urban restoration. He argued that while the reclamation process homogenized the earlier uses of spaces, it also dragged open the potential for counter-memory and heterodoxy.

As urban planners and real estate developers reclaimed buildings for heritage or commercial purposes, and despite the degree of ster-

ilization that this entailed, de Certeau believed that their function—which was to conserve or co-opt the past—was still haunted by ghostly presences. The conversion of buildings into new commodities is never totalizing and unidirectional. Michel de Certeau claims that the potential for reclamations to contradict the functionality of developers always remains relatively open. Even when buildings are alienated from the subjects who created their history, the very displacement effect can also initiate poetic and critical practices. For de Certeau the meaning of a city is not confined to the visual effect of either structural refits or superficial renovations, rather it is constituted in the stories that consciously or unconsciously unfold in the practices of its inhabitants.

This means that renovation does not, ultimately, know what it is ‘bringing back’—or what it is destroying—when it restores the references and fragments of elusive memories. For these ghosts that haunt urban works, renovation can only provide a laying out of already marked stones, like words for it.¹²

TO LEAVE THE EARTH

The Belgian artist Panamerenko claimed that the ‘highest purpose one can have is to devise a way to leave the earth’. Most critics have taken this proposition literally and interpreted his artworks as either the visual poetics of flight or an eccentric attempt to bridge art and science. In my view, the role of thermodynamic and closed systems theories in Panamerenko’s sculptures are part of a broader concern with the dialectic of entropy and progress: his art, like that of Robert Smithson and Stan Douglas, are therefore critical meditations on the ruins of modernism.

Panamerenko was born in the Belgian port city of Antwerp. ‘His father was an electrical engineer who worked in the dry docks of the port area of the city. His mother, initially a factory worker, later

she kept a shoe shop in the busy Offerandestraat close by the railway station and Antwerp's famous Zoological Gardens.¹³ I do not quote these biographic details in order to gratuitously 'fill in' the artist's background. The topographic coincidence of the location of Panamerenko's mother's shop between the railway station and the gardens, and his father's working at the historic port area, can be represented as indices in the artist's imaginative and material development. Panamerenko has in many senses of the phrase never left home. His artworks combine elements that represent the place and materiality of his parent's workplaces. In machines he saw new possibilities for movement. Between the gardens and the docks of Antwerp he explored the yearning for departure. Yet these dreams of leaving are also bound in a history of swinging economic fortunes. It is no coincidence that while the port area of Antwerp has been caught between industrialization and globalization, Panamerenko continues to make flying machines which despite constant tinkering and innovation, never seem to get off the ground, or at least, not in a sustainable way.

The persistence of this practice tends to suggest that the aim is to get to this state of absolute flight, but not necessarily by following the directions of the scientist. What is left behind in Panamerenko's inventions is the object with all its technology in naked display. His sculptures are inevitably static, composed like a performance that has been stripped down to the bare structure of its gesture. The value of his sculptures is not measured by either their novelty nor their utility. In contrast to the sleek technology of stealth bombers, his flying machines are more like the skeletal remains of the pterodactyl. The futility that permeates his flying machines is of the same air as that which is found in a ruin. What Panamerenko offers is the gravity of the past by revealing the struts and studs of modern ambitions. The promise of liberation is held but only in a paradoxical way, that is, by using the limits of technology to prove the miracle of nature, and in the process to 'approach air as a medium, as the stuff of sculpture'.¹⁴

CITIES LEFT IN TRACES

A city that is dominated by monofunctionalism—with exclusive boundaries that separate classes, activities and values—is a repressive city. Some residents may find safety and comfort in such a city. Yet a city, in order to evolve, must also incorporate difference. The parafunctional use of space is linked to the innovation that comes from living with difference in a city. Rigidity in function is totalitarian because not only does it specify the precise use of space but also it is an imposition of a limit on the identity of users. By contrast the parafunctional use of space not only reveals the hidden potential of space, but also extend the forms of interaction. The parafunctional use of space opposes the technocratic definition of the city. By focusing on the way minorities and homeless people develop micro forms of invention and appropriation we can also witness greater levels of urban improvisation and new forms of cultural adaptation. The term parafunctional can thus slip between being a noun to a verb. It can simultaneously refer to a site and an activity. This double function is crucial to its meaning. Social space is never an abstract volume but a series of bounded practices. The social life of cities is not measured by the scale of its monuments but by the quality of interactions. What the term parafunctional seeks to expose is the constant and unpredictable dialectic between place and practice. The investigation of parafunctional spaces is also the pursuit of the hidden link between the ruins in and the energy of the city. This link is not unique to contemporary cities, it is simply most visible during transitional phases. Cities always change. Only the curse against change repeats itself. In 1430 two melancholic Romans looked into the centre of their city in order to not only recall visions of the past but also to find fault with ‘fortune’.

Not long ago...when Antonio Lusco and I were free of business and public duties, we used to contemplate the

desert places of the city with wonder in our hearts as we reflected on the former greatness of the broken buildings and the vast ruins of the ancient city, and again on the truly prodigious and astounding fall of its great empire and the deplorable inconstancy of fortune.¹⁵

CONCLUSION

WRITING, ART, PLACE

The narratives of place and displacement are now central to the definition of contemporary art. New forms of cultural practices that have both transfigured the relationship between the local and the global and mobilized the discourse of difference are now common throughout the world. The characteristics of contemporary art have now extended the spectrum that was previously defined in terms of 'dematerialization'.¹ The temporal dimensions, site specificity and relational experiences in contemporary art practice have presented new questions for the understanding of artistic production and dissemination. If the material object of art is not only shorn of its auratic power but also displaced as the ideal destination point in the production of art, then this poses a range of questions in relation to the status of collections in the institutions of contemporary art, the role of the art historian, the function of the curator, the emergence of the 'documenteur', the place of the witness and the dynamism of social interaction. The coda for the contemporary artist is now defined by the desire for being *in* the contemporary, rather than producing a belated or elevated response to the everyday. To be in the place of the here and now, to work with others in a simultaneous and concrete practice, to see the realization of work in the experience of connection, is to raise what Scott Lash calls the 'performative' aspect of practice.²

It is now plausible to defend the dual right of contemporary artists to both maintain an active presence in a local context and participate in transnational dialogues. As Jimmie Durham has noted, the situation of art is different to what it was even a decade ago and, as he says, looking at it from outside the centres of the artworld it certainly appears different. There is no longer just one mainstream. There is no absolute boundary between different people and no outsider position from which one can launch attacks against the insiders. In Durham's words, the positions are more complex:

I don't live in Germany, I live in Berlin, a cosmopolitan city. I don't live in Europe, I live in Eurasia. I'm not here as a stranger, I'm not here to attack and I'm not here to join up either. My situation surely is the ideal situation, that we should all see ourselves in, and I think we do personally, don't we? I think when you go home, you don't say, 'Well here I am, I'm a nice English student', you think maybe the opposite, you think, 'I want to tell these people something', not to attack, but, it's you who wants to participate, your individual self who wants to participate and be of influence in the world and not be part of the football team or something, not to be part of the 'defined group'. This is the good part of art, this is where art gives us knowledge and energy at the same time.³

If the idea of the contemporary in art no longer derives its saliency from spatial-temporal markers of rupture or exclusion—it is neither confined to the perimeter of the West, nor presupposes a clean break with the past—then it is probable that the conceptualization of the new and the critical is now 'situated' in a more complex narrative, one that is not conceived as a linear trajectory towards a point of singular destination and based on binary distinctions, but rather entangled in multiple associations with a

confounding sense of attachment that includes the double experience of displacement in the very practice of emplacement, and an awareness that tradition and innovation are not opposed, but part of the cultural dynamic of renewal and continuity.

Reflecting on the discourses of hope and critique I also note a disquiet over our own positioning within the national narratives and an unease in the supposed fit between our internationalist aspirations and the rhetoric of globalization. Who would proudly say I belong here and everywhere. It is this ambivalence over belonging and affiliation that also represents a challenge to the old avant-gardist rhetoric of detachment and provides a new starting point for radicalizing the new politics of institutionalization. Our sense of belonging may not be unequivocal but there is still the need to be attached to something. There is no longer the self-belief that the critic or the artist can claim an outsider position. Coterminously to be inside is not necessarily a sign of conformity and enclosure. However, this ambivalent positioning, which is in part symptomatic of the transformed conditions for the material production of art, also requires a rethinking of the reflexive terms of agency. In this book, I have stressed that the idea of agency in art needs to be extended, and in particular the concept of cultural authority and responsibility needs to be distributed in all social directions. It should not privilege the ego of the artists but attend to the radial interactions that occur in all the engagements with art. This implies a rethinking of not only the process by which artists communicate with the public, but a critical examination of the active role—not just mediating function—of writers, curators and technical producers. I have argued that the concept of place has been distorted in the mainstream discourse of art. On the one hand it has been both exaggerated by nationalist accounts and entirely missed in the formalist discourses on art. A new concept of place needs to be inserted, one which addresses both the radial energies and complex junctures in the social engagement with art. I refer to one form of this process of critical engagement as topographics: a

form of representation that requires critical attention to place (*topos*) and modes of perception (*tropos*). This has radical implications not only for rethinking the position of the artist, but also the relation with all other social agents. For instance, the place of the writer that engages with spatial aesthetics also involves a form of copresence—a willingness to participate within the spatial-temporal demands of contemporary art and a desire for being in the moment of making. This is a departure from the conventional role of the art historian which rarely allowed the investigator to step out of the shadowlands of the detached witness, and whose texts relied on the authority that comes from the belated task of interpretive refinement and contemplative reasoning. Lucy Lippard is one of the rare critics to have worked rigorously but never confined her writing to a single disciplinary approach. In a recent book she reflects on the way that different theoretical movements, and what she now calls the ‘lure of the local’ have shaped her thinking: ‘I’ve spent my adult life not as an art historian but as a witness to the absolutely contemporary—what’s happening or should in progressive, mostly North American art right now.’⁴

In the field of contemporary art such forms of social investigation and cultural practice are becoming more common. The shift from studio practice to what Nicolas Bourriaud called ‘relational aesthetics’,⁵ is another way of mapping the trajectories I identified in this book. In this transition the notion of collaboration has come to the centre of critical and artistic practice. It requires both more dynamic exchange, intimate knowledge and immediacy in feedback. The dynamic that mobilises cultural practice is the expanded form of collaboration. I will outline ten key characteristics:

1. Artistic practice is defined through, not in advance, of collaboration.
2. Collaboration is the socialization of artistic practice.
3. Identification of common needs is the politicization of artistic practice.

4. Critical engagement with the specificity of place involves more than using it as a stage for new ideas.
5. Mobilization of communicative networks extends and implicates both the local and transnational domains.
6. Artistic practice is inserted in the same time-space continuum of everyday life.
7. Institutions are not external objects but resources critical for the material production of art.
8. Critique of the sovereign position of the artist in creative direction leads to a redistribution of social responsibility.
9. Creation of horizontal models of cultural and social engagement.
10. Institutions shift from being the terminal destination to a transitional platform for dissemination.

Throughout this book I have not only sought to engage with contemporary art but also to situate it within what I consider to be the two key unfinished tasks of modernity—negotiating cultural difference and confronting the ruins of the industrial age. Amidst the turbulent flows of globalization there has been growing anxiety over the status of minority communities. They are no longer seen only as irritant splinters that disrupt the comfortable narrative of the nation as family, but also as semi-autonomous diasporic communities that can establish their own transnational networks. These multiple ‘structures of feeling’ to different places are now seen as evidence of treacherous attachments and have given succour to the paranoid delusions that global terrorism is transmitted in these information flows. New forms of authoritarian loyalty tests are being conjured as the academic debates on the representation of cultural identity in the form of hybridity or creolite are being contested. It is unclear whether this new political terrain will impact on the theoretical frameworks for representing difference. Even within the emergent field of critical theory, there is still division over the significance of power differentials between

different constituencies, as well as a lack of consensus over the cultural consequences of displacement in relation to tradition and innovation. Throughout the debates in critical theory there has been a switching and a times conflation of two models of difference; difference under the sign of homogenized subsumption where it comes under the reign of the similar, and difference as constitutive force in a heterogeneous collage where it is unleashed in the form of the uncanny. Two questions remains unanswered. Under what conditions does difference mask the dominant structures of uniformity? How can it ever escape this oppressive logic and heighten critical awareness?

The second incomplete task is the recognition of the legacy of the ruins of the industrial age. While dominating much of the urban landscape, they still lurk in the margins of contemporary consciousness. Ruins, like abandoned warehouses, obsolete factories and disused transport depots, have served as alternative spaces for artists' studios, provided the material for art, and prompted the meditative rethinking on entropy and decay. The material and symbolic significance of ruins has barely registered within the mainstream discourses of modernism and contemporaneity. I have referred to these sites and their attending conceptual challenges as parafunctional. Ruins not only offer the challenge on how we can 'clean up' and recycle, but also provide a spatial allegory for the function of absence. To his credit, Okwui Enwezor elevated the legacies of colonialism and industrialism as the two axioms that structured the main pathways through the mega-exhibition *Documenta XI* in 2002. Even if most critics wanted to relegate the conceptual challenge of this exhibition to the last gasps of an exhausted link to theory, it was by no means the last word on the subject. I would suggest that we return to this critical junction between topographics of ruins and difference, and in particular consider the multiple function of ruins in modernity. There are at least five distinct roles for ruins in the rewriting of modernity:

1. As an allegory for the unconscious.
2. Demarcating the material foundations and limits of modernity.
3. Providing the materiality of reclamation in modernism.
4. Presenting the stage upon which the contemporary houses the modern.
5. Revealing the dynamic of incorporation and amnesia in urban transformation.

The aim of this book is not only to map out the interventions that artists have made in specific places, or to account for the political consequences of their gestures, but to see how the interconnection of these actions is part of an ongoing attempt to grasp the emerging senses of identity and the complex forms of relations with others that occur in everyday life. As a writer I am primarily concerned with the way art participates in a field of understanding and communicates with the world. I don't confine my discussion to calculating either the aesthetic value or political objectives of art, but rather I seek to grasp the sense of place that is created as art stimulates sensations and engages relations with other people. In contemporary art practice the place for art has been dispersed and decentred. An integral part of the practice of many contemporary artists is the specific act of placing. It is these trajectories and topographies of art in everyday life that drive my thinking. However, these topographies are also surrounded by pitfalls. Engagements with the everyday and the writing of art can be compared to Elias Canetti's analogy of the interpretation of a dream to a birdcage with the door slightly ajar. You awaken from a dream but what happened? The bird has gone. Writing the story of art cannot trace the function of the feather in flight, it must suggest another trajectory. Writing does not aim to return to the imperious originality of the artwork, but to replicate the experience of the origin in the working through of ideas.

In Greek, there is slight typographical difference between the

word for (*topos*) place in which events occur, and the (*tropos*) method in which they occur, but I would also claim that they are linked to the collaborative process of topography. To collaborate with other people, to receive them and work with them, is to be attentive to this engagement between *topos* and *tropos*. Collaboration is a way of receiving others, involving both the recognition of where they are coming from, and the projection of a new horizon line towards which the combined practice will head. I see the practice of writing on art as a form of imaginary collaboration. The practical exchange of information between the artist and the writer is not as vital as the intellectual pursuit of a common trajectory.

Topography is conventionally understood as referring to either a system for mapping a landscape, or the method for studying the history of the contours and properties of a place. The aim of this discipline is to provide a detailed analysis of the surface of a landscape, and to construct a story of its formation from the residual signs that are contained within its volume. It involves both observation and excavation. I refer to my writing on art as topographical because it too deals with both the imaginary and geographic role of place. My writing, like all forms of art criticism, is para-sitic. It occupies a separate space but also relies on the trajectories in contemporary art. Artists have used specific places, not as a flat stage upon which they can perform their practice, but as active sites. Artists acknowledge the constitutive role that spatial forces play in our everyday experience. In this sense, place functions more like a scene. Still life painters have also been conscious of the paradoxes of capturing the flux in time and place. The model that I am referring to goes beyond the challenge of rendering the dynamic scene in a given form, however, as it includes the fields of institutional distribution and social contextualization. In the past artists concerned themselves primarily with production; the other domains were passed on to curators and critics. By incorporating the responsibility of distribution and contextualization

within the multi-spatial processes of production, the artist has effectively expanded the field of art. This enhances the artist's capacity to intervene in the institutional structures and heightens the potential for social dialogue. As art operates in an expanded field, the process of critical feedback, interruption and transformation multiplies. The consequences of this model demand multi-linear forms of engagement and an openness to unpredictable responses, for the process of dissemination and contextualization is no longer designed as apparatus that serves and promotes the originality of the art work, but becomes an active force in the construction of a field of aesthetic experiences and social meanings.

To write on the topographic relationship between art, place and the everyday is neither a new historical approach towards particular places, nor a survey of new artistic practices. This writing practice does not resemble an account of artistic representations of a specific landscape, nor does it track the artistic movements that are traversing the territories of modernity. My methodology is not based on an art historical survey of new tendencies in contemporary art, nor am I upholding a definitive sociological perspective that reveals the geopolitical characteristics of art. It requires that the writer does not simply describe and analyse the composition of the artwork. My task is not confined to authenticating the artist's provenance, classifying their practice, and evaluating their achievements. It does not confine the discussion of the context of art to a mapping of its specific geographic origins or location. My concern is not bound by the need to identify the extent of political influences or economic dependencies. It does not narrate the genesis of the work according to the fixed coordinates that are either stated in the artist's intentions, or defined by prior sociological debates on the context of art. While drawing from these academic disciplines, my goal is to articulate the way artistic practice is creating new levels of engagement within the available spaces of contemporary art and expressing ideas that are part of everyday life.⁶ I am

not seeking to establish a methodology that is oblivious to the discursive formation of art history or claiming a new transcendence from socio-economic forces, rather I am defining an expanded field that requires a new cross-disciplinary mode of analysis.⁷

This shift in methodology is related to two parallel developments in contemporary thinking and practice. First, artists have developed strategies which in themselves are more cross-disciplinary and operate in an expanded field. They have not only destabilized the conventional boundary between art and popular culture and challenged the museum's representational frameworks, but also critiqued the institutional history of art. Second, the challenge of critical theory, feminism and postcolonial theory has been to push writers beyond the task of recording and reflecting on the material presence of art, and into an engagement with the frameworks of perception and experience. The task of the writer is not only to reflect on art, but also see how a representation is both transformative and constitutive of subjectivity. As Rogoff rightly observes, art does not serve as either a transcendental guide, or a mirror for revealing the world we are in, but offers the space of an interlocutor. This methodology is also vulnerable. Artists are not always consistent interlocutors, and in my experience I have found that their engagement with theory and politics is riven with ambivalence.

The unconscious process of gestation and the rigorous execution of craft, which are crucial for both art and writing, are often divorced from their common origin and reconstituted in an oppositional or hierarchical structure. By some curious transposition of values, even the most rigorous conceptual artists have been seen repeating some of the most pathetic postures of crude romanticism: 'I have already made the work, why should I have to write about it?' Implicit in this exclamation is the assumption that writing is at best beneath, or at worst opposed to, the creative practice of art. It is assumed that writing follows art like the shadow follows the body; it only emerges after the art is complete. This hierarchical

relationship is even evident in cases where the artists declare a commitment to performative and processual levels of art. The writer is either subordinated to a servant's role—dutifully following the directions established by the artist, or at worst, elevated as the master surveyor—seeking to extract a surplus of meaning from the raw materiality of art. As an author there is nothing more repugnant than when an artist lures me into their studio with the sole intent that I might write about their work. If the work were worthy of discussion then I would never simply write about it. Why should writing remain in the place of 'about'? Is it not more valuable for the writer to have the ambition to participate in a dialogue on the idea, and then move on to develop parallel and complementary trajectories of thought?

Artistic practice is not to be understood as something that occurs outside or above other theoretical investigations on the concepts of place and culture, but neither can it be totally explained within the confines of theory. Deep affinities exist between art and theory. However, there are differences in the ways art and writing articulate change in everyday life. In bringing theory and art together, I have attempted to avoid the common pitfall of subsuming the identity of one to the priorities of the other. To define this dialogical process, I will outline three principles that shape my understanding of the specific forms of knowledge that can emerge at the intersections of art and writing.

First, writing needs to be grounded in a specific field and not just within the parameters of the artist's practice. Writing does not begin with the material presence of art, but with the identification of a question. At the beginning of the formation of art history as an academic discipline, Aby Warburg warned against its 'excessively materialistic or excessively mystical tenor'. He feared that this would restrict our view of the place of art in the world. Almost a century later, the dominant methodologies in art history are still caught 'between the schematisms of political history and the doctrines of genius', and that, rather than developing a global

perspective, the focus has been confined to ‘petty territorial restrictions’.⁸ What is still lacking is a method that does not pose the question in art within an overdetermined category like national characteristics, or the essence of an artist’s personality, but in an open process of interrogation. In the absence of such an ‘open’ methodology, I would stress the need for dialogue between artists and writers. Communication does not proceed when the boundaries of exchange have been predetermined by either party. The broader function of art and the text of writing are defined by their need to address a specific question in a field. This field is their context. When the artist and the writer share recognition of the expanded field, they can proceed to make work that can relate to each other and the result should be larger than the constituent parts.

Second, writing is grounded in the materiality of thought. There is no hierarchy in the materials or media for thought. All thinking is metaphorical. It is, by comparing, juxtaposing, translating, narrating, repositioning—that is by assembling—that we create and think. In this sense, writing and art have a common root. The purpose of writing is not to repeat the materiality of a thought process that has been exercised with other materials and media, but rather to develop its unique voice in the forum of ideas. Writing on art is not the promotional work of art, but a different level of engagement with the working through of ideas.

Third, writing is a reflexive and transformative process that alters the ground in which it is situated. Writing is driven by the need to address a question. I emphasize the term address, rather than answer, because it is a form of interpellation—a harking of the other. In this process of addressing the other as a subject there is a critical feedback process: both the perception of art and articulation of the text are introduced into a circular system of mutual transformation. When the writer enters into a field with a specific question, then the outcome can never be predictable. The displacement effect of writing can never be defined from the outset. The

result of writing is not in the completion of a task, but in the unfolding of the layers within the original question.

This third element is often confused with the ivory tower connotations of academia or art for art's sake. I am not aiming to defend an inward-looking preciousness. However, I am trying to differentiate a modality which is alive to all the dynamic process of investigation, from a model which charts out the journey in advance of its subject and blocks the reception of all the shifts in meaning that occur in the processes of investigation. My aim is not to explain the validity of certain aesthetic judgements, to demonstrate the effects of social structures, nor to document the development of a style. The purpose of writing on art is not to excavate the fixed signs that are either located in the work, or buried in the artist's unconscious, and then provide a narrative that mirrors back the original work of art. It is my contention that the truth-values of art can only be translated in other ways. The power of art is, in part, fuelled by its ability to rip meaning from one context and insert it into another. As Benjamin cautioned, the artist is a destructive character.⁹ It is neither possible to preserve or possess the past in art. Other places and times exist in art in the form of 'citation'. Writing about such processes and events cannot offer the ultimate redemption of the original. To seek to render the work of art within such a safe memorial is worse than allowing it to be ravaged by indifference or sink in oblivion. The journey of writing does not end in the conservatory. The context of art is never apprehended directly, only by metaphor. To aim to redeem the place of art is not a trajectory back to its origin, but a movement towards the elusive place of truth from which it originates. This place is now entangled in the contradictory forces that simultaneously push for globalization and/or regionalization, it articulates itself in the dynamic that includes both cultural differentiation and homogenization. It is not a matter of just recognizing the boundaries of difference. The narratives of place and displacement are not binary opposites but part of a broader quest for

understanding the imperatives of social connection and a new language that allows for a dialogue with difference.

Art history and cultural criticism have done a great deal to place artists on pedestals and art in boxes. The historical surveys that took for granted the determining influence of national boundaries or prioritized formal concerns have ultimately perpetuated some of the worst excesses of hagiography in the age of secularism. If we are to explore the full significance of 'spatial aesthetics', then surely it begins at the point of representation. We need to shift positions. Writing on and about art is dead. It only comes to life when it begins with or takes a cue from art and thereby proceeds to find parallel and latent trajectories. Donald Kuspit had long ago differentiated critical writing on art from what he called 'impression management' by embracing the ideological nature of art and writing. Following from Walter Benjamin he argued that art and writing were just a 'piece of dead matter' unless they were collectively grasped and drawn into a dialectical relationship with their own historical place in the world.¹⁰ An integral part of the life of art and writing is its reception and utilization. Therefore the political life of art exists in the ambiguous space between the claims of heteronomy and autonomy. Confined to either of these two ends, it withers, but without these horizons it depletes the energy of its own being.

Melancholic meditations on the modernist revolutions that never happened have become the last refuge of idealism. It is akin to the comment made by Marx on intellectuals who were comfortable in their own alienation. Today it is not the difficulties of speech in a world of cacophony that is as confronting as the necessity to speak and participate in a collective voice of resistance that will otherwise fade before it finds its common chords. The critic and the historian need to step into the active role of the intimate observer. Detached reflections do not live in their own isolated zone but are to be seen as part of the intricate and subtle feedback process between auratic symbols, lived responses and transformative social relations.

Writing is not confined to the trade between artist and critic, but catapulted into the social life of cultural dissemination. It no longer dwells purely in the interior life of things, nor does it seek to explain art away by reference to external structures, but rather it situates the poetry of infinite and unwritten meanings in the traffic of anonymous and strange encounters that hold up every dialogue. A constant oscillation between the inside and outside is the best cure for boredom and the ultimate protection from commodification.

To breathe new life into the 'expanded field' of art requires a vigorous embrace of multi-disciplinarity. In this embrace one also finds the trace marks of other cultural practices. There are already the prints of other artists in this theoretical body. Knowledge of the intersections between theory, history and psychoanalysis is not an external guide but part of the vocabulary and context of cultural practice. Theory can therefore presume its exteriority at its peril. There are three key reference points that guide my understanding of the relationship between art and writing:

1. Context is a relatively open and multiply networked field.
2. Material production and conceptual thinking are co-constitutive.
3. Reflexivity in agency is also a displacement of the originary.

The challenge today is not only to recognize the difference of minority or marginal communities but also to rethink the terms of what Okwui Enwezor has called the new universalism. It will involve a radical analysis of the structures that enable certain forms of agency and the opportunities for dialogue across cultural boundaries. My own training has been at the crossroads of the social sciences and humanities. I am neither a philosopher nor an art historian. I have studied political science and sociology, but I am referred to as a cultural theorist. Leading scholars have routinely lamented the crisis in their disciplines, but for me this is

a constitutive norm for thinking. I have found refuge and drawn benefit from the emergence of new cross-disciplinary programs in the University. There is, I suspect, a third space between art history and cultural studies that is still waiting for a home in the institutions of ideas. To write into the intellectual and aesthetic space of contemporary art requires not a report card of achievements, like those displayed in academic journals and fashionable magazines, but a new modality for investigating the fields of thought and practice.

At a time when the myths of art and the material conditions for artistic production are coming to greater levels of contradiction, it is important to articulate the basis on which we seek to defend the value of critical practice. For at least three decades, radical figures in the arts and the humanities have challenged the myths, biases and exclusions within the dominant institutions of culture. At the core of this attack was the dismantling of the spirit of romanticism. This ideology was used to legitimate the putative freedom of the artist on the grounds that a higher 'muse' inspired them, and that the institutions of art were secure in their privilege because they were regarded as the hallowed vessels for uplifting the 'people'. The subsequent attack against the romantic spirit of art and culture was motivated by the desire to test which 'people' were excluded from the elevated forms of consciousness, and which gender was denigrated by the appeal to the muse. In theory, the masculinist spirit that sustained romanticism has been now successfully unzipped and dislodged from its privileged pedestal. However, in the political calls for access and equity a new and aggressive discourse has rushed in to redefine the 'rights' of the people. The instrumental base of economic rationalism has neither offered a more lofty perspective on culture, nor developed new critical practices in the pursuit of expanding the social bases of popular engagement. Contrary to the promises of access and equity, we have witnessed new forms of crude collaboration with the corporate sector and the reduction of culture to a purely decorative function.

We may intuitively recognize that all human relations cannot be explained away or accounted for by economic imperatives, but we also lack a coherent and plausible discourse that can define an independent space for art and culture. After the collapse of the romantic ideology which relied on the patronage of a bourgeoisie that was eager to enhance its status, and the demise of state-supported welfarist cultural projects, we now confront a further structural shift in the foundations that underpin the relationship between art and society. Artists and critics are now faced with the challenge of re-imagining forms of social exchange that can offer an ethical alternative to the tyranny of supply and demand. It is no longer tenable to defend the arts and culture in the normative discourse of an outdated and discredited romanticism. But what happens to the spirit? It may vanish from our political sphere but it never really disappears. The spirit of art and culture has come back to spook us. It now comes in the guise of artificial intelligence, new media and virtual reality. Before we get carried away on the wings of the techno-utopian prophets, I hope this book has revitalized the position that critical thinking has always occupied—the representation of the past as an intervention that speaks into the needs of the present, in order for us to understand the selves we are already becoming.

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 17. Peter Burger, *Theory of the Avant Garde*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1984, p.22.
 18. Lois McNay, 'Michel de Certeau and the Ambivalent Everyday', *Social Semiotics*, vol.6, no.1, 1996, p.67.

4. THE POLITICS OF ART

1. Victor Burgin, *The End of Art Theory*, Macmillan, London, 1986, p.161.
2. *Ibid.*, p.39
3. Or as they were fashionably referred to during exhibition openings and parties, 'D&G'.
4. This was powerfully illustrated in the presentation of London as the global epicentre for art in the 1990s in the exhibition *Century Cities*, Tate Modern, London, 2001. In comparison with the display of Moscow in the 1920s and New York in the 1960s, the representation of London was intellectually vacuous, politically indifferent and formally derivative.

5. John Roberts, 'Mad For It!: Philistinism, the Everyday and the New British Art', *Third Text*, Summer, 1996, p.30.
 6. One need only recall the convenient relationship between Saatchi as a patron of young British artists and his advertising company appropriating the ideas of these artists in its advertising campaigns. See Rita Hatton & John Walker, *Supercollector: A Critique of Charles Saatchi*, Ellipsis, London, 2000 and Julian Stallabrass, *High Art Lite: British Art in the 1990s*, Verso, London, 1999.
 7. Tagg, op. cit., p.42.
 8. A point stressed during a debate on the Turner prize at the Cornerhouse Gallery, Manchester, November, 1995.
 9. Kobena Mercer, 'Ethnicity and Internationality: New British Art and Diaspora Based Blackness', *Third Text*, no.49, Winter 1999–2000.
 10. John Slyce, 'Message in a Bottle: The Ethics of Representation Revisited', *Dpict*, no.6, Feb/Mar. 2001, p.39.
 11. Tagg, op.cit., pp.28-29.
 12. Paul Carter, *Placings*, forthcoming.
 13. Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism*, Verso, London, 1989.
 14. John Berger, *And Our Faces, My Heart, Brief as Photos*, Writers and Readers, London, 1984.
 15. Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, Polity, Cambridge, 2000.
 16. Talking about the everyday: An interview with Jonathon Watkins, Director of the 11th Biennale of Sydney', *Art and Australia*, vol.36, no.3, 1999, p.334.
 17. Benjamin Gennochio, 'Everyday: The Biennale of Sydney', *Third Text*, no.45, Winter 1998–99, pp.82–3.
 18. Juliana Engberg, *Signs of Life*, Melbourne International Biennial, Melbourne, 1999.
6. CAMERA CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION
1. Hal Foster, *Recodings: Art: Spectacle, and Cultural Politics*, Bay Press, Port Townsend, 1985, p.204.
 2. Stuart Hall, 'Negotiating Caribbean Identities', *New Left Review*, no.209, Jan/Feb 1995, p.4.
7. THE CONSTITUTION OF CULTURAL IDENTITY
1. Stuart Hall, 'The Question of Cultural Identity', *Modernity and its Futures*, Stuart Hall, David Held and Tony McGrew (eds), Polity Press in association with the Open University, Cambridge, 1992, p.275.
 2. Zygmunt Bauman, 'From Pilgrim to Tourist—or a Short History of Identity', *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds), Sage, London, 1996, p.18.
 3. Quoted by Stuart Hall in, 'Gramsci's relevance for the study of race and ethnicity', *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*,

- David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (eds), Routledge, London, 1996, p.433.
4. Stuart Hall, 'Negotiating Caribbean Identities', *New Left Review*, no.209, Jan/Feb 1995, p.14.
 5. Stuart Hall, 'Introduction: Who Needs Identity?', *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds), Sage, London, 1996.
 6. Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', *Identity*, Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1990, 226.
8. CULTURES ON THE MOVE AND THE CHANGING SELF
1. Peter Caws, 'Identity: Cultural, Transcultural, and Multicultural', *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*, David Theo Goldberg (ed.), Blackwell, Oxford, 1994, p.382.
 2. Homi Bhabha, 'What Does the Black Man Want?', *New Formations*, no.1, Spring 1987, p.119.
 3. Homi Bhabha, 'Interrogating Identity', *Identity, ICA Documents*, no.6, Lisa Appignanesi (ed.), London, 1987, pp.6-7.
 4. Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, London, 1994, p.150.
 5. *Ibid.*, p157.
 6. Stuart Hall, 'Introduction: Who Needs Identity?', *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds), Sage, London, 1996.
9. TRACING THE CONTOURS OF CULTURAL IDENTITY
1. Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', *ICA Documents 7: Black Film, British Cinema*, Kobena Mercer (ed.), London, 1989.
 2. *Ibid.*, p.28.
10. THE ART OF PASSING IN CULTURAL IDENTITY
1. Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and Ambivalence*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1991.
 2. Zygmunt Bauman, 'From Pilgrim to Tourist—or a Short History of Identity', *Questions of Cultural Identity*, Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (eds), Sage, London, 1996, p.26.
 3. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Alfred Knopf, New York, 1993, p.336.
 4. Carole-Anne Tyler, 'Passing: Narcissism, Identity and Difference', *Difference: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol.6, nos 2 and 3, 1994, p.212.

12. THE SECRET LITTLE BAY

1. Nicholas Baume, 'Critical Themes in Christo's Art, 1958-1990', *Christo*, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney, 1990, p.40.
2. Daniel Thomas, 'Australia, Bulgaria, Christo', *Christo*, Art Gallery of NSW, Sydney, 1990, p.26.
3. *Ibid.*, p.25.
4. Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to the Greco*, Faber & Faber, London, 1980.
5. Quoted in C. R. Boughton, *A Coast Chronicle—The History of the Prince Henry Hospital*, Sydney, 1981, p.9. Boughton was also the longest serving Infectious Disease Physician at the Prince Henry Hospital.
6. Peter McKenzie and Ann Stephen, 'La Perouse: An Urban Aboriginal Community', in Max Kelly (ed.), *Sydney: City of Suburbs*, NSWUP, Sydney, 1987, p.183.
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13. THE PRODUCTION OF SPACES IN ART

1. This condition is a recurrent aspect of industrial modernity. As Walter Benjamin (1999: 210) wrote of André Breton and Surrealism in 1929: '[...] he was the first to perceive the revolutionary energies that appear in the "outmoded"—in the first iron constructions, the first factory buildings, the earliest photo, objects that have begun to be extinct [...]. No one before these visionaries and augurs perceived how destitution—not only social but architectonic, the poverty of interiors, enslaved and enslaving objects—can suddenly be transformed into revolutionary nihilism...They bring the immense forces of "atmosphere" concealed in things to the point of explosion.'
2. Nick Tsoutas, 'The Paradoxes of the Museum and Contemporary Spaces for Art', in *Empires, Ruins and Networks*, eds Scott McQuire and Nikos Papastergiadis, Rivers Oram Press and Melbourne University Press, 2005.
3. For a more extensive discussion see my essay 'Small Gestures in Specific Places', in *Empires, Ruins and Networks*, eds Scott McQuire and Nikos Papastergiadis, Rivers Oram Press and Melbourne University Press, 2005.
4. *If I Ruled the World*, an exhibition curated by Bryndis Snaebjornsdottir and Ross Sinclair, at the Living Art Museum, Reykjavik and McLellan Galleries, Glasgow, catalogue, edited by Mark Wilson and published by Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow, 2000.
5. Ilya Kabakov, 'Two Windows', *Crossings*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 1998.
6. T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1999.

14. FINDING THE WAY HOME

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2. Rupert Sheldrake, *Dogs that know when their owners are coming Home*, Arrow, London, 2000.
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5. *If I Ruled the World*, an exhibition curated by Bryndis Snaebjornsdottir and Ross Sinclair, at the Living Art Museum, Reykjavik and McLellan Galleries, Glasgow, catalogue, edited by Mark Wilson and published by Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow, 2000.
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3. Edward W. Said, *The World, The Text and the Critic*, Vintage, London, 1991, pp.5-8.
4. Bond, op.cit., p.15.
5. Peter Sloterdijk, 'Modernity as Mobilisation', *Speed—Visions of an Accelerated Age*, J. Millar and M. Schwarz (eds), Photographers Gallery, London, 1998, pp.43-52.
6. Ibid., p.19.
7. See also Ibid., pp.130-3.
8. Ibid., p.20
9. Ibid., pp.20-1.
10. Ibid., p.21.
11. Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear*, Picador, London, 1998.
12. Anthony D. King, *Urbanism, Colonialism and the World Economy*, Routledge, London, 1990.

17. TRACES LEFT IN CITIES

1. Robert Harbison, *The Built, The Unbuilt and the Unbuildable*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1993.
2. Michel Serres, *Detachment*, C. James and R. Federman (trans),

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3. A. A. Gill and photos by Paul Lowe, 'The Dead Sea', *The Australian Magazine*, 9-10 September 2000, p.26.
 4. Interview with John Lee, Manchester, March 2000.
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 7. Camilo José Vergara, *The New American Ghetto*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, 1999.
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 12. *Ibid.*, p.143.
 13. Jon Thompson, 'Panamerenko: Artist and Technology', *Panamerenko*, Hayward Gallery, London, 2000, p.15.
 14. Thompson, p.46.
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