Art in the Global Present

Nikos Papastergiadis and
Victoria Lynn (eds)

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Introduction

Nikos Papastergiadis

The sensory awareness of the world is fundamental to art. Art is a world-making activity. The relationship between the sensory faculties and the formal practices of art always lead to the production of multiple worlds. This book explores this relationship between the real and the imagined, the material and the virtual worlds of art. It puts the sensory activity of world making into the heart of our understanding of the political. Given the rapid and profound nature of change in the world, we introduce a wide range of perspectives and concepts. In particular, we focus on the responses initiated by artists and an examination of the intersections between artistic practice and theoretical speculations. In the context of art, the essays in this book address current social issues such as the impact of migration, the 'war on terror' and global financial crisis as well as questioning the transformations produced by new forms of flexible labour and the digital revolution. The broad aim of this diverse collection of essays is to provide an insight into some aspects of the function of art in a globalising world. This is not to claim that art is now doing the work of politics but rather to see how art is a vital agent in shaping the public imaginary. The book addresses this in three ways. It outlines resistance to the politics of globalisation in contemporary art, presents the construction of an alternative geography of the imagination and reflects on art's capacity to express the widest possible sense of being in the world. In short, this book explores the worlds that artists make when they make art.

Art, politics and participation

One of the inspirational starting points for this collection has been Gerald Raunig's book *Art and Revolution*.[1] Raunig translated Deleuze and Guattari's terms deterritorialisation

and reterritorialisation, smoothing and striating, to redefine the conceptual framework for understanding the context and processes for the production of art. We extend this mode of addressing art from such a framework formed by the dynamics of displacement and reconnection. This perspective is vital because the world is becoming increasingly polarised. The emancipatory rhetoric of globalisation has been overtaken by the grim realities of precarious existence and the politics of fear. In the broad sphere of contemporary art some barriers have been broken. For instance, the incorporation of artists from almost every part of the world has challenged the Eurocentric modernist canon and undermined earlier racist classificatory systems. However, new divisions are appearing. Why is the power of so few artists so much greater at a time when the democratisation and popularisation of participatory processes is also at its zenith? Given the unprecedented cosmopolitanisation of the art world, why are 50 per cent of the artworks shown at Documenta 12 and the 2007 Venice Biennale produced by artists who now live in Berlin? Gregory Sholette quite rightly claims the vast majority of the artworld exists in a creative equivalent to what physicists call dark matter. That is, over 96 per cent of all creative activity is rendered invisible so as to secure the ground and concentrate the resources necessary for making the privileged few hyper-visible.[2]

In this context of gross inequality, where for one reason or another the overwhelming majority of art is ignored, devalued and rejected, it is necessary to develop a new approach towards the critical function of art. The radical aim is not to simply widen the aesthetic terms of entry and extend the art historical categories of reception, but to develop a 'subaltern' perspective on the multitude of artistic practices, rethink the conceptual frameworks for addressing the interplay between art and politics, and open up the horizon for situating the flows between the perceptual faculties and the contextual domain. This shift in approach and thematic understanding is also driven by transformations in the conditions of artistic production, the logic of cultural participation and the status of the image in contemporary society. The bulk of artistic practice now arises from a mixed economy of production.

Many artists now work in a collective environment and adopt collaborative methodologies. Even artists who prefer to work alone in their studio are outsourcing more and more of the technical production of their artwork. At a time when art is being subsumed into brand culture the hand of the artist is also becoming less and less visible.

The position of the public has also moved away from that of passive receivers of information towards a role as active co-producers and participants in shaping their own experience. The proliferation of images, the diversification of visual techniques and the incorporation of visual images into communicative technologies also produced a phenomenon that we define as the 'ambient image'. In this context the image is not just a pervasive element in everyday life, but its function has come to dominate other communicative practices. The boundary between the image and other forms of conveying information and knowledge is now blurred. As Hou Hanru argues in this volume, the institutions of art cannot exempt themselves from the prevailing economy of commodification and the society of the spectacle. However, he also observes that artists are deconstructing the conditions of visuality and creating images that possess a mysterious afterworld, what he calls an 'incarnation' of the fuzzy space between doubt and certainty. Lucy Orta also provides an example of her collaborative practice that demonstrates a joint commitment to both aesthetic experience and activism for social justice. This task is not pursued in a secondary or supplementary manner. Neither her art practice nor her political involvement is conducted as a belated adjunct to the other. Orta not only makes the point of combining her political aspirations into her artistic projects but also mobilises all the art world's infrastructure into the development of the artwork. Museums and galleries are therefore not just stages for displaying her art, but also organisations that can be coordinated into collective public action.

As critics and curators engage with artistic practices that have assumed a wider scale of public interaction or situated their artwork in the general urban environment, it becomes necessary to approach these artistic events and objects with a perspective that is more attuned to the process of public

feedback. To critically reflect on the effects of the 'ambient image' will require more than a critique of the institutional context of spectatorship. This will involve an examination of the image beyond the formalist and sociological paradigms that tended to construe it as a unique object that contained a specific message. By contrast, an 'ambient perspective' will note how the image is formed through a fluid process of looping networks, and proceed from the assumption that its social meaning has no certain endpoint. The logic by which the social meaning is connected to aesthetic experience becomes even more open-ended. Meanings can proceed in multiple directions and, while this enhances the democratic impulse in aesthetic participation, it also sharpens the ambivalence that has trailed in the wake of image. Plato never trusted images. He argued that they were primarily a means to distort reality and deceive people. In the present context of networks for both the global circulation and the corporatist appropriation of the image the task of critical interpretation is even more poignant.

Net activist and theorist Geert Lovink argues that artists are struggling to maintain their role as leaders in the 'Twitter revolution'; he also notes that curators are finding it difficult to develop tools to survey the vast visual material floating on the net. The first wave of net.art in the 1990s experimented with manually written HTML code of the then brand new World Wide Web. The aim of this work was to reverse and deconstruct the utopian communication design of the dotcom era. A decade later, the so-called Web 2.0 is popularised, corporatised and even more controlled. How do artists, critics and creative workers respond to the rise of blogs and social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace? Leading scholars in the field of new media Jean Burgess and Scott McQuire both claim that new conceptual models and methodological approaches are necessary to engage with the complex modes of public participation in the virtual environment. The question that recurs in these essays is, can we re-invent the spaces for creative intervention in digital culture?

Such questions have been at the forefront of artistic collectives. The core aim of Critical Art Ensemble, RTMark, The Yes Men and Institute of Applied Autonomy was to 'hijack'

the new media technologies that had been made accessible by global capitalism, and reroute them towards alternative modes of civic generosity, corporate unzipping, public revitalisation and general mayhem. These groups would organise media pranks that mocked the duplicity of universities and art institutions, exposed the hypocrisy of politicians and swarmed the websites of major corporations. But rather than using strategies that called for outright opposition and confrontation, these collectives developed new kinds of hit-and-run electronic guerilla tactics. Inspired by the writings of Michel de Certeau on the practices of reclaiming everyday life, these groups organised themselves along a flat and open structure, rejected the idea that they were visionary leaders who could spearhead the changes to come for the rest of society, and embraced the concept that utopia was an imaginative state that needed to be experienced in the complex layers of 'now time'. With ironic micro steps and a holisitic vision of human freedom, they proposed that the potential for revolution was already in their everyday relationships rather than in a haughty manifesto for the future. From high profile interventions by The Yes Men into Dow Chemicals' and Union Carbide's reparations for the damages to the people in Bhopal for the 1985 chemical disaster,[3] to countless acts of everyday resistance, there is now evidence that artists are incorporating the tactics of cultural activism into a broader reconceptualisation of the common good and the contest for public space.

In 1996 the curator and critic Nicolas Bourriaud observed that artists had already developed sophisticated responses to the radical transformation of public space.[4] This transformation had been generated by the rise of informal networks and social entrepreneurship, as well as the contraction of state support for public institutions and civic spaces. Amid these structural changes there has also emerged a new discourse on the function of creativity. Sociologists have taken a leading role in both promoting the innovations produced by cultural agents and protesting against the precarious working conditions that are endemic to this 'lifestyle'.[5] The spread of this ambivalent perspective on creativity has also prompted a more nuanced awareness of the place of contemporary art in capitalist network. First, it has not only highlighted the

polarising and unequal distribution of rewards within the cultural sector, but it has also helped focus attention on the tendency to reduce the merit of artistic work to a narrow form of instrumental welfare benefit and immediate financial return. The instrumentalisation of art has proceeded at pace with the growing rhetoric that 'everyone is now creative'.

Second, the dispersal of creativity into all aspects of everyday life provides a conceptual challenge. In the early parts of the twentieth century the formation of a creative industry was linked to the mass production and standardisation of culture. The critical discourse developed by Teodor Adorno from the Frankfurt School highlighted the extent to which the public was repeatedly duped. In the current context, the technologies of cultural dissemination have become more dispersed and the complicity between producers and consumers is far more interconnected. Hence, the role of the critic is no longer confined to exposing the means for manipulation and forms of deception. Critical thinking now requires more than showing how the public is the victim of false and distorted messages. This is not an entirely new step; rather it is a move from ideological critique towards a genre that gives more space to the interplay between the virtual and actual world. It is a genre that resembles the mode of writing that Taussig calls 'fabulation' and Latour calls 'poetic writing'.[6]

Third, recognising that public consumption of dominant cultural forms is not an automatic sign the public imaginary is being dominated has also provoked the need for a more nuanced view of cultural agency. More recently, Raunig has argued that it is necessary to unpack the links between the dominant forms of cultural production and the processes of cultural participation.[7] The conceptual frame proposed by Raunig addresses a cultural dynamic, formed by the double functionality of forces, that produces both disconnection between positions that are inside the system and feedback towards those outside it. From this perspective, it is possible to think in terms that exceed conventional and oppositional binaries. In the first section of this book we present a range of theoretical texts and accounts of artistic strategies that demonstrate critical engagement with the status of the image, the institutions of art and the spaces of public culture. The

approach most favoured by the contributors acknowledges complicities and seeks to work through the inherent contradictions rather than flee towards a utopian alternative. There is a move away from oppositional models of art and politics, with their clichéd declarations of protestation, towards modalities that explore the political through the ambivalence of a participative logic in art.

The geography of the imagination

One of the most persistent barriers to understanding the complex interpenetration of the cultural field and the process of hybridisation in cultural practice arises from the assumption that the local is somehow separate from the global. While the idea of the global has become a banal feature of discourse in contemporary art, and there is due recognition of its association with a decline in the purchase of national frameworks, the meaning of the local is increasingly positioned as negative. The global is usually associated with mobile forces and defined in opposition to entities or institutions that are firmly located in a particular place. The influence of ideas or values that are embedded in local places, therefore, are often set up as if to collide with more aggressive globalising forces.

The meaning of place has become a central issue in understanding contemporary art. To what extent is art bound to a place and how does this affect its capacity to address the world? In a recent article for *Artforum* the American art historian David Joselit asks: 'What is the proper unit of measurement in exhibiting the history of a global art world?'[8] Joselit notes the nation is still the fallback framework for explaining the historical context of art. However, he rejects the view that the locus of art's belonging is confined to territorial boundaries. He proposes an alternative dual perspective. First, he focuses on the biography of artists. He astutely notes that artists are forever 'shuttling between their place of origin and various metropolitan centers while participating throughout the world'. He also aims to reinvigorate the avant-garde idea of an artistic movement as an organising principle for contemporary art. This idea is promoted because it combines the unifying process of a distinctive philosophical concept or aesthetic style, with the physical mobility of people and ideas

within a network.[9] Hence, Joselit proposes that contemporary art can be mapped in relation to various movements that have assembled in a given place and succeeded each other in time.

We would contend that the unit of belonging in the world is bigger, more diffuse and in some sense also more place-based than another trans-territorial unit. The trans-territorial conception of globality in the art world still retains a fundamental faith in art as a generator of 'newness'. The artworld's attraction to the diasporic condition, an emergent cosmopolitan order and the challenge of globality, is repeatedly framed in an economy that translates the foreign into the familiar. This is the economy of metropolitan benefit, whereby the centre accumulates as the periphery donates. It is the same economy that reduces aesthetic practice to a machine that feeds the ever-hungry desire for novel forms and objects. This attitude towards art as a producer of different forms, new perspectives and more accurate representations of the world is a central element in the validation of modern culture. Hence, the dominant conception of modernism accentuates a specific idea of modern subjectivity. It retains the belief that artists have the ability to see the world anew, and to create objects of value. However, much of the motivation driving the recent re-evaluation of modernism and the growing popularity of contemporary art is sustained by the underlying belief that artists are the source of an ever-expanding supply of globally branded commodities and the trend setters for global fashion. The corollary to this is that the globalising appetite for contemporary art is showing a scant regard for the way art provides a form of place-based knowledge.

We argue that a different kind of worldiness is also in motion in the world of contemporary art. There are so many worlds within the art world that it is now impossible for a curator to be a global surveyor. Artists now literally throw themselves into extreme conditions, assume the role of mediators in complex cultural crossroads, give form to nebulous threshold experiences and create situations in which the imagination can take each participant into an unknown world. Between these worlds are the heavy extremities of unfulfilled hopes and the realisation of apocalyptic fears. According to Cuauhtemoc Medina, a curator and writer working in Mexico,

globalisation has not lead to the refinement of a cosmopolitan subjectivity — so that the peoples of the world are more sensitive towards each other's needs and appreciative of their cultural difference — but on the contrary has heightened exposure to physical violence, economic instability and the disruption of social norms. Through the work of Theresa Margolles he sees an effort to explore the jagged interplay between the global and the local in its most visceral manifestation: the spilling of blood in the service of narco-trafficking. Margolles's installation contain traces of the victim's blood.[10] Medina insists that Margolles's art is not confined to an exercise in ethical meditation on trauma, or a psychological mourning of loss. The work, he declares, makes an attempt to relieve the pain, but it also directs our consciousness back into the hot sensation of violation. At this level of material confrontation Medina finds a compelling instance of the way artists have a habit of both putting their finger into the wound, and creating a more direct cartography of interconnection between the global and the local.

Ranjit Hoskote also explores the dialogue between local artistic practices and the wider discourses circulating in a global arena. He asserts that, despite the negative connotations of belatedness, the periphery is often a far more dynamic theatre of development than the centre. Danae Stratou's essay addresses the general process of translation between sensory awareness of the external world and the creative process of image formation in the inner world. The movement between sensation and imagination is, she argues, a restless journey, and in the video installation *The Globalising Wall* (2012), it has prompted her and collaborator Yanis Varoufakis to explore the numerous walls erected either as a consequence of political hostility or as an attempt to thwart the movement of people.[11] Australian artist Callum Morton tackles the thorny of issue of deprovincialising the imagination of gatekeepers at the metropolitan art institutions. Working from two anecdotal references to Australian art that display a European curator's disdain and a European intellectual's dismissal, he exposes a legacy of guilt and envy lurking in the blind spot of the colonial imaginary.

The poetic essay by the Native American collective

Postcommodity zooms into the worlds that lay within words. The text is a reflection on the their installation *With Salvage and Knife Tongue* (2012), a generative video featuring American and Australian Indigenous people articulating lines of an indigenous empathic poem about the displacement of people.[12] Throughout this section of the book, contributors question the extent to which the local and the global are constantly interpenetrating each other and explore the need for a new conceptual framework that speaks to this process. They unzip the conventional hierarchy between local and global and assert that place really matters in art. As Hoskote argues, artists do not confine their imagination to their place of origin, and in order to capture the meld of the local and the global that constitutes the 'armature of place across our planet' he opts for a perspective that highlights regional flows.

Into cosmos

Cosmopolitanism is another concept increasingly adopted to address a wide range of functions. It is used to define the dynamics of cultural exchange between the local and the global and explain the agency of artists that are prominent in the global artworld, and also serves as an overriding frame for the space of contemporary art. Curator Nicolas Bourriaud claims that contemporary artworks are invariably translating local and global forms.[13] Artists are seen as exemplars of a new global self.[14] Biennales and festivals are seen as platforms for bringing ideas from all over the world into a new critical and interactive framework.[15] These are contestable propositions. However, our concern in this section is not to expose the gaps in curatorial surveys, question the embodiment of a cosmopolitan subjectivity or even dismiss global art events as a cultural smokescreen for corporate capitalism. Rather than pursuing a polemical engagement with the structural balance between global opportunities and deficits, we seek to explore the aesthetic possibilities inherent in the cosmos of art.

Exploring the cosmos of art is not the same as the art historical surveys of the global art world. The ambitious surveys of artistic developments across the world, whether conducted by teams distributed across different regions or directed by a solitary figure who has sought to integrate

emergent trajectories and classify diverse practices into a new hierarchy, have stumbled before a fundamental problem.[16] To have a total worldview of contemporary art is now impossible. Art is produced at such a rate and in so many different places that no one can ever see the whole. The events and horizons of contemporary art have become resistant to any totalising schema. However, by bringing into closer focus the elemental terms of globe and cosmos we seek to develop an alternative exercise in imagining the aesthetic forms of connection and being in the world. A simple distinction may help. In the most banal uses of globalisation there is very little significance given to the key term 'globe'. The world is treated as a flat surface upon which everything is brought closer together and governed by a common set of rules. Globalisation has an integrative dynamic, but a globe without a complex 'ecology of practices' would not have a world.[17] A world is more than a surface upon which human action occurs. Therefore the process of globalisation is not simply the 'closing in' of distant forces and the 'coordination between' disparate elements dispersed across the territory of the world. As early as the 1950s Kostas Axelos made a distinction between the French term 'mondialisation' from globalisation. He defined mondialisation as an open process of thought through which one becomes worldly.[18] He thereby distinguished the empirical or material ways in which the world is integrated by technology from the conceptual and subjective process of understanding that is inextricably connected to the formation of a worldview. The etymology of cosmos also implies a world-making activity. In Homer, the term cosmos refers to an aesthetic act of creating order, as well as to the generative sphere of creation that exists between the earth and the boundless universe.

Cosmopolitanism is now commonly understood as an idea and an ideal for embracing the whole of the human community.[19] Everyone committed to it recalls the phrase first used by Socrates and then adopted as a motif by the Stoics: 'I am a citizen of the world.' Indeed the etymology of the word—derived from cosmos and polites—expresses the tension between part and whole, aesthetics and politics. In both the Pre-Socratic and the Hellenistic schools of philosophy, this tension was related to cosmological explanations

of the origin and structure of the universe. In these early creation stories the individual comes from the abyss of the void, looks up into the infinite cosmos and seeks to give form to their place in the world. It is also, in more prosaic terms, a concept that expresses the desire to be able to live with all the other people in this world. This ideal recurs in almost every civilisation. In the absence of this ideal materialising as a political institution, it nevertheless persists and reappears as a cultural construct in each epoch. This tension between the residual cosmopolitan imagination and the absent historical form of cosmopolitanism also appears to be a constant in the artistic imaginary. We claim that artistic expression is in part a symbolic gesture of belonging to the world. This wider claim about the perceptual and contextual horizon of art arises from the belief that it draws from ancient cosmological ideas and the modern normative cosmopolitan ideals.

For the Stoic philosophers in the Hellenistic era, the concept of cosmopolitanism was expressed in an interrelated manner—there was spiritual sense of belonging, and aesthetic affection for all things, as well as political rumination on the possibility of political equality and moral responsibility. Since the Stoics the spiritual and aesthetic dimensions of cosmopolitanism have been truncated. By the time Kant adopted cosmopolitanism as a key concept for thinking about global peace, the focus was almost entirely on deprovincialising the political imaginary and extolling the moral benefits of extending a notion of equal worth to all human beings. Since Kant, the debates on cosmopolitanism have been even more tightly bound to the twin notions of moral obligations and the virtue of an open interest in others.

Cosmos, for our purpose, refers to the realm of imaginary possibilities and the systems by which we make sense of our place in the world. The broad themes examined by Jan Verwoert, Linda Marie Walker, Paul Carter and Barbara Creed—spirit, heart, empathy, mystery, void, vortex, universe—are taken as starting points for reflecting on art as a world-making activity. What sorts of worlds are made in the artistic imaginary? Can we grasp the cosmos of art if we confine our attention to the traditional methods of iconography and contextual interpretation? Is something else necessary?

Jan Verwoert revisits the art historical approaches of Warburg and claims that 'sympathetic animism' still provides a basis upon which we relate to art. Verwoert focuses on the function of radical empathy and the mediating role of the material objects of art. It is through these 'things', such as the marble of sculpture, that we establish a sense of connection. However, this experience of sharing is paradoxical. While we may have not participated in the shaping of the material into an aesthetic object, our experience of the matter of art inspires both an ethical and aesthetic sense of shared experience. From the artist's perspective the process of empathy and creative engagement with the world also proceeds through the material manifestation of an object such as a drawing or sculpture. This material form articulates a sense of solidarity with an external thing in nature. However, this act of aesthetic representation also refines the artist's attunement with and participation in the world.

Linda Marie Walker extends the recent investigations into the process of empathy to the ancient idea that aesthesis begins with breathing in the world, and the proposition that the seat of imagination rests in the heart. This is not a retreat into sentimental romanticism but a step towards overcoming the stultifying divide between thinking and feeling. Walker insists that our insight into the world-making activity of art is dependent on our capacity to train the imagination to find its place in the cosmos. It is from this perspective that we seek to highlight the aesthetic dimensions of cosmopolitanism. In fact, we will claim that the dominant emphasis on the moral framework and the disregard for the aesthetic process has constrained the scope of being cosmopolitan. Expressing interest in others or recognising the worth of other cultures are no doubt worthy moral stances, and necessary if we are to engage in any dialogue about what is possible in a world in which rival viewpoints jostle for space. But if this approach is defined exclusively in a moral framework, it also constrains the very possibility of being interested in others. In short, if interest in others is subsumed under the moral imperative of feeling obliged to respect others, then the possibility of an aesthetic engagement is subordinate to a normative order.

But from where does the impulse of conviviality come? Let

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us take a few steps back to the idea that cosmos is an order-making activity. Cosmos is not just a counter to the condition of chaos, and an intermediary zone between the material earth and the boundless space of the universe, but is also the fundamental activity of making a space attractive for others. We suggest that a cosmos starts in the primal desire to make a world out of the torsion that comes from facing both the abyss of the void and the eternity of the universe. This act of facing is a big bang aesthetic moment, filled with horror and delight. Our aesthetic interest in the cosmos is therefore interlinked with the social need for conviviality. The everyday acts of curiosity, attraction and play with others does not always come from a moral imperative, but also from aesthetic interest. Do we possess a language that can speak towards the mystery of this interest? Art history, and the humanities in general, have struggled to develop a language suitable for representing the mercurial energy of aesthetic creation. The pitfalls of the two extremes—between either narcissistic mystical illusionism or empirical instrumentalism—is most evident in the contrast between Romanticism and Marxism. Verwoert argues that the deeper challenge is to overcome the obsession with authenticity and mimesis, and consider how empathy with nature leads to a form of 'non-exclusive being in and belonging with the world'.[20]

The aesthetic dimension of cosmopolitanism begins with the faculty of sensory perception and the process of imagination. We begin with the proposition that an act of the imagination is a means to create images that express an interest in the world and others. Imagination is the means by which the act of facing the cosmos is given form. Imagination—irrespective of the dimensions of the resulting form—is a world-picture-making process. Therefore, the appearance of cosmopolitan tendencies in contemporary art are not just the cultural manifestations of globalisation. Paul Carter also rejects the neocolonial vision of globality as a starting point for thinking about the cosmos in art. He begins his essay with Emanuel Swedenborg's work *Heaven and Hell* and explores its influence on artists like William Blake.[21] Carter claims that Blake's understanding of imagination was drawn from a belief in the inheritance of angelic intelligence and a prophetic power to

look into the future. For Blake, poetic responsibility extended to both the infinite and the minute. The figurative representation of this micro-macro-cosmic correspondence is found in the image of the vortex. Carter claims that the artist is the revolver, the stirrer of the face of the water, always suspended between self-reflecting narcissism and insight into the deep.

Barbara Creed focuses on the divide between humanity and animals, while also discussing the way artists cross the frontier separating the material from the immaterial. Death is the paradoxical point that connects human with animal. Creed argues that many species of animals have demonstrated a sophisticated awareness of dying, death and grief. Some species even enact thanatosis or 'feign' death as a survival strategy. This form of 'playing' with death is suggestive of a fascination with the power of the void. Drawing from Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject and Joseph Beuys's elaboration of the role played by the shaman as mediator between human and animal, life and death, Creed asks whether it is possible for the artist to enter the abyss and represent the way in which human and non-human animals encounter the void?

Creed observes that representations of the void appear in forms that connote both an expansive and intimate sensation. The abyss can be thought of as an encounter with the empty dark space beneath the ground and the void as the wide endless expanse that can engulf everything. Yet, this sense of the infinite that heads in two directions from the inside and the outside always starts from the body. The body both contains and is surrounded by the infinite. Hence, the appearance of the abyss in the microscopic details of everyday life and the awareness of the macro scale of the void produce a kind of ambient consciousness of being. Julie Rrap also noted that George Bataille's concept of the 'formless', which has been influential in the way we understand the relationship between body and ground in both surrealism and feminist art practices, was also a philosophical intervention that sought to cleave open the categories that distinguished visual perception from sensory comprehension.[22] Bataille proposed a wider spectrum of awareness and an ambient perspective that challenged many of the fundamental postulates of subjectivity and knowledge. From this modality one is forced to think of the

subject not just as an omniscient 'seeing-eye' that represents the world that is 'out there', but as a sensory body composed of and surrounded by communicative matter.

The ultimate aim of this book is to expand our understanding of art by reconfiguring the debates on the politics of aesthetics within the imaginative sphere of the cosmos. It presents a focus on art that combines a wide range of theoretical, curatorial and artistic approaches. Collectively they examine artistic practices that are driven by the desire to capture the world in a single image, as well as the social impulse to construct networks that contain generative and competing viewpoints. Through the assemblage of diverse voices and perspectives we have also been forced to rethink the scope of key concepts. Cosmopolitanism is usually understood as both a descriptive term that refers to metropolitan situations in which cultural differences are increasingly entangled, and as a normative concept for representing a sense of moral belonging to the world as a whole. More recently, the concept of cosmopolitanism has been applied to the political networks formed through transnational social movements, and the emergent legal framework that extends political rights beyond exclusivist territorial boundaries. In its most comprehensive mode the concept of cosmopolitanism also assumes a critical inflection whereby it refers to the process of self-transformation that occurs in the encounter with the other.

Cosmopolitanism thus captures a diverse range of critical discourses that address the shifts in perspectival awareness as a result of the global spheres of communication, the cultural transformation generated by new patterns of mobility, the emergence of transnational social networks and structures, and the processes of self transformation that are precipitated through the encounter with alterity. However, the normative discourse on global citizenship does seem rather lonely and out of touch. Our hope is that by addressing the contemporary forms of aesthetic cosmopolitanism we can also reinvigorate both the sensory awareness and a more worldly form of belonging.

Notes

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7   G. Raunig, *Factories of Knowledge*, trans. A. Derieg (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2013).

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20 Jan Verwoert, discussion during keynote address, Adelaide Festival, 3 March 2012.

21 Emanuel Swedenborg, De Caelo et Ejus Mirabilibus et de inferno, ex Auditis et Visis (*Heaven and its Wonders and Hell From Things Heard and Seen*), 1758.

22 Julie Rrap, response to keynote address by Barbara Creed, Adelaide Festival, 6 March 2012.

I: Art, Politics and Participation

What sort of knowledge of the world does art furnish? The discourse of aesthetics has, in broad terms, proposed that art is the free play of the mental faculties. It is capable of giving form to sensation, impression and intuitions without a conceptual order yoked to the logic of either instrumental function or reasoned benefit. Art represents the capacity of human imagination to conceive possibilities that have no necessary objective purpose and, as Kant argued, it can appear in an almost disinterested state of apprehension. However, for all its appreciation of art's creative force, the discourse of aesthetics has generally viewed the knowledge of art with suspicion. Philosophers acknowledge that art can constitute its own subjective world, but they tend to argue that truth does not reside in art. This fundamental distinction between art's ability to constitute its own image of the world, and the role of reason to deliver the truth of the world, has vexed all debates on aesthetics and politics.

This section begins with the philosophical ruminations of Gerald Raunig on the Occupy movements and incorporates the critical reflections of Lucy Orta on her collaborative artistic practice, the critical and theoretical exposition by Scott McQuire and Jean Burgess on participatory practices, the rapid fire commentary by the curator Hou Hanru on the power of doubt and new media activist Geert Lovink on social media. It explores the possibilities of moving beyond the dead-ends that appeared whenever the relationship between art and politics was defined as either the pictorial representation *of* political messages, or the political inspiration that is drawn *from* art.

The approaches are distinct from views that either uphold art as a mercurial entity that eludes the grasp of theory, or condemn art to a position of 'complicit alongsidedness' with the dominant social forces. Of course, there is no shortage of examples in which art has been co-opted to either decorate a corporatist agenda or promote activist propaganda. Art does not exist in a pure space outside the messy complicities of institutional objectives and economic imperatives. However, recent tendencies in art also point towards a different mode of engagement with the processes of social transformation and social media, and in these instances the medium of

art is not confined to a fixed object. This mode of political engagement and the current play with non-material media compels a reconfiguration of the relationship between art and politics. Although artists are forever denying that they are part of something that is recognised and defined by others, artistic practice is now increasingly tending to be defined as a medium for constituting 'the social' in contemporary society.

Given the politicisation of contemporary visual practice, and the aestheticisation of contemporary politics, the discourse of aesthetics cannot be confined to the contemplation of an artistic object. Aesthetics is now propelled into the ambient field of image production and circulation. The ubiquity of images and the enhancement of public participation has not only disrupted the conventional categories for defining the agency of the artist and opened up the meaning of collective authorship; it also underscores the necessity to rethink the function of the imagination as a world-making process.

NP & VL

n−1. Making Multiplicity:
A Philosophical Manifesto

Gerald Raunig[1]

Occupation without subject. Movement without subject. Asubjective composition. The occupation movements of the last years have been characterised by their dispensing with any subject. No unity, no wholeness, no identifiable class. Classical theories of revolution would see this as a problem, the (revolutionary) subject being a condition for the possibility of revolt, insurgency, revolution as a fixed component of a theory of stages: only once a uniform subject appears on the horizon, a molar block, the working class, a united front, only then—seen from this angle—can the revolution get going.

And yet, the absence of the subject does not have to be interpreted as a deficiency. Quite the opposite, it could indicate a new quality in the revolution, in a henceforth *molecular* revolution, and the primacy of multiplicity within it. When the subject is missing, it has not just gone amiss, as a gap (still) gaping and begging to get closed. In view of the composition of the molecular revolution there is no need for unification, or for the representation of a unified (class) subject by leaders, party and vanguard. The rejection of the primacy of *the* class, or of a specific class (be it the proletariat, or a middle class threatened by decline), does not in any way imply tuning out the hierarchising differentiation that takes place more radically than ever in current capitalist production. Differential capitalism striates the differences, hierarchises and valourises them. And yet molecular multiplicity raises no hopes in any of the imaginings of resistance against this machinic-differentiating capitalism that undertake to homogenise and totalise differences. Even in their negative manifestation there is no way back ahead of multiplicity, but only its dis/continuous unfolding.

But even the subject, the one, the whole, where it is no longer absent, is not the consequence of a process of collecting, forming, unifying the many, the singular, the dispersed, to be composed into a molar block. It does not follow a logic of addition, but one of subtraction. It must first be extracted from the uncountable multiplicity, detached, dis-counted in order to be one. The one emerges only when the logic of counting, classifying and identifying lays its grids on the multiplicity; when the uncountable is domesticated in the process of counting.

The subject can appear only through subtraction from the multiple. $n-1$.

Radical inclusion and molecular organisation

The Occupy movement, and before it the Spanish 15-M movement and in some respect also the North African revolutions that have come to be labelled uniformly as 'Arab Spring', have doubtlessly been pervaded by genealogical lines of earlier movements and uprisings. The practice of occupation played as much a recurring role as the critique of representation and the invention of new interweavings of dispersion and assembly. The amphibian paths of the revolutionary machines nowadays no longer need a durable mole burrow in order to dig their way through the world and to make their appearance here and there, in different geopolitical situations, in a new-old guise. They do not even need the form of the snake that time and time again makes its way in all directions without digging a fixed system of burrows, without limiting itself to any given element on earth and without leaving any traces. The floating narratives, forms of action and bundles of affects of the occupation movements are social-machinic assemblages, and thus continuity and discontinuity, repetition and difference, resumption and invention concatenate in them without transition.

There is no linear relation between the different occupation movements of 2011 and earlier movements. The US-American Occupy movement borrowed from the gestural techniques of the Social Forum as much as from old anarchist modes of action and grassroots forms of assembly, from the waves of university occupations since 2008, as well as

from the practice of occupying the Tahrir Square in Cairo. Conversely Egyptian activists adopted aspects of the *people's mic* developed in the Occupy movement. This is not a linear relation that might postulate an origin here or there. There are only similarities, singular recurrence and implicit and explicit references, processes of translation in all directions and productive mistranslations in all dimensions.

In the context of this simultaneous disjunction and conjunction the occupation movements have successfully left behind constitutive identifications and escaped old and solidified categories. Time and time again they traverse the dichotomous segregations in violent and nonviolent, revolutionary and reformist, intellectual and mass, young and old, majorities and minorities, political, apolitical and antipolitical. What counts is the affection in the interstices between these dissimilar pairs, common action taking account of the dangers for the precarious bodies, the practice of radical inclusion.

Radical inclusion is by no means the indiscriminate, farcical repetition of a hippie dream, a romantic projection of the suspension of class boundaries and national borders, the fantasy of painless fraternisation. At the same time the concept does not draw the simple picture of an open door (as in 'leaving the door ajar'), of letting someone into a room and engaging with the one thus admitted, of a possible integration into an already existing territory. Radical inclusion means rather the potentiality of openness of *existential* territory itself, of a fundamentally inclusive territory without doors or thresholds, not surrounded or traversed from the outset by borders, an inclusive mode of reterritorialisation of space and time. This implies not only the absence of a social preformation of the territory, but also the impossibility of linear-strategic planning, the unpredictability, the social and organisational openness of molecular reterritorialisation.

The reterritorialisation in question applies not to space alone. What shapes the modes of action of the protesters is also a reappropriation of time. The occupiers take seriously the space and time that they establish. They take their time for long, patient discussions, take time to stay on-site and develop a new day-to-day life. In an otherwise boundless life

they spread out short new durations of daily life. This is no exit, no disengaging from the world, not an out-time but a breach in the time regime of subservient deterritorialisation. It is no longer a struggle for a mere reduction of working time, but an entirely new striation of time as a whole. In machinic capitalism the stake is to have it all — the totality of time, its appropriation as a whole. In the midst of the nervous poly-rhythmicity of precarious life, a surplus is invented — and in the midst of all this subservience, a desire is produced not to be co-opted. In the middle of a rushed timelessness the precarious occupiers apply different time relations, striate time in the patience of the assemblies, in the spreading of life, dwelling, sleeping onto the squares.

Radical inclusion means to sustain and affirm the differences, and within them continuously to differentiate, multiply, in a continuous expansion of multiplicity: difference between the differentially hierarchised precarious, difference between different groups of homeless, people threatened by homelessness and those fighting for their right to a place to live, difference of the militant modes of expression between younger and older generations, difference between those who can be physically present at an assembly and those who can-not, whose presence however is made possible by a post-media ecology of live streams, tweets and social networks.

Radical inclusion in no way implies allowing any reter-ritorialisation in the form of racisms or sexisms. On the contrary, multiplicity is to propose a form that will deprive any discriminatory identification of its breeding ground. This does not, however, make it an absolute deterritorialisation in which every reterritorialisation, all the way to attempts at organising, would remain barred. It is rather a case of molecular forms of organisation, of instituting ever-new existential territories that are able to counter the closures. Instead of accepting the molar organisational narratives of revolutionary history (and its structuralising historiography) as the only one possible and to reproduce it to infinity, there is a need for invention, innovation and multiplication of revolutionary practices and narratives. Then the one great event turns into an unending chain of instituent practices, the overtaking of the state apparatus into a consolidation of constituent power, the

institutionalisation of the revolution into the invention of ever-new monster institutions, institutions of the common.

Molar organisation arises as a striating reterritorialisation. It focuses the struggles on a main issue, a principal contradiction, a master. In a molecular world of multiplicity, dispersion and multitude, a new form of reterritorialisation is called for, a molecular and inclusive reterritorialisation beyond individual or collective privileges. It does not pursue particular goals, does not establish privileges to then secure them. It is the privileges of each singularity taken by itself that defy all individual and collective privileges. But these privileges exist only where each singularity can live out its own strangeness to the extent of its possibilities, and experiment with its own form of concatenation. No privileged position for intellectuals, for party apparatchiks, artists, the black block or professional revolutionaries. Exclusivity for all. Molecular struggles are struggles that emerge accidentally and continue to spread through what is accidental to the accidentals. No master heads the molecular organisation.

Multitude, dispersion, multiplicity have quite evidently become part of the contemporary modes of production of post-Fordist capitalism, of current ways of living, and yet they can hardly be found in forms of political organising. The multitude has become the technical composition of post-Fordist production, but to a much lesser extent its political composition. On the contrary, existing forms of political composition seem rather to prevent a non-identitarian composition in a dispersed multiplicity than to foster it. Trade unions, political parties and other traditional institutions in their rigid, structuralised form often constitute impediments to the imagination and invention of a molecular political organisation.

In the 1990s and 2000s decentralised, polycentric, molecular modes of organisation remained limited to tiny fractions of social movements. From Zapatism to Reclaim the Streets, from the critique of globalisation to the Argentinian Piqueteros, from the noborder network to queer-feminist actions and to the Euromayday movement, practices taking a critical stand on representation have multiplied, but a massive, monstrous, viral spread of molecularity has failed to set

in. While at the level of the modes of production dispersion, multiplicity and cooperation have imposed themselves as a form of 'communism of capital', multiplicity has remained marginal in political organisation.

Sure, the multitude has been invoked for more than a decade now. 'In truth, it is not enough to say, "Long live the multiple", difficult as it is to raise that cry … The multiple *must be made*.'[2] This admonition by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari seems now, more than thirty years after it was published, to flow like multiplicity itself over the thresholds of perceptibility of micropolitical endeavours—'with the number of dimensions one already has available—always n−1'.[3] n−1, the formula for multiplicity from *A Thousand Plateaus*, seems to have been realised more broadly than ever in the occupations and assemblies of the last years, increasingly since the beginning of 2011, with their inventive techniques that indeed 'make the multiple'.

The human microphone: neither human nor microphone

Besides its modes of assembly and of occupation, the Occupy movement's most talked about practice is likely the *human microphone* (or *people's mic*). Its use emerged in September 2011 as if by accident and, as it were, out of the adversity of the legal situation at Zuccotti Park. It then very quickly developed far beyond the initial occupation in Manhattan and was further refined.

The specific first place of the Wall Street occupation, whose old name was Liberty Plaza, embodies the current paradox of blurring the public and private, being a public square in private hands. The empty promise of the 'public space' was here taken literally. Public space does not exist—certainly not in the smooth spaces of the urban centres, be it the touristic non-place of the Puerta del Sol, be it the privatised sphere of Zuccotti Park, be it the density of the traffic at Tahrir Square. And yet—or maybe precisely because of this—the new activisms occupy central squares, turn them into common-places as a paradoxical provocation of normativity and normalisation.

Zuccotti Park is special insofar as it is a public square in private hands. In these circumstances the use of microphones,

megaphones or PA systems within it was prohibited by police order. This is why in larger general assemblies the occupiers started to repeat in unison every sentence by the speaker. The functionality of this repetition initially lay in making a speech intelligible even to hundreds of people in an open-air setting.

From a distance this procedure of 'amplifying' looks like a priestly technique (see, for example, YouTube videos of the process). Here the hoarse voice of the prayer leader, there the enthusiastic affirmation of the congregation. Between shepherd and flock it is a pastoral relation between the government of the whole and the individuals—*omnes et singulatim*. Singularities are in danger of drowning in this process that is both homogenising and individualising. The more sentences the crowd repeats, the more the content, the meaning and the appropriation of the statements are relegated to the background. While some seem to fall into trance precisely through the pastoral (self-) relation, for others their exhaustion brings about a certain automation. The mechanical reproduction of the language material neatly divided into portions can be seen as the rehearsing of (self-) subjugation.

If one looked at the human microphone from this perspective only, one would have to understand it as a technique of centralisation, homogenisation and unification of the multiple. But is it not rather the case 'that this kind of machinic multiplicity, assemblage, or society rejects any centralising or unifying automaton as an "asocial intrusion". Under these conditions, n is in fact always n–1.'[4] In this second meaning of minus in n–1 the question is no longer only that the one does not preexist the multiple, that it has not always already been part of the multiple, that it emerges only in and out of subtraction. The one, unity, unification is not only a by-product of the introduction of a grid of countability—it is actively *rejected* by the machinic multiple. The molecular crowd, the multiple, turns away the 'asocial intrusion' of the one, attacks the one. It does not permit the transformation of the uncountable into the matrix of counting.

Seen from this angle the potentiality of the human microphone as an offensive form for the multitude and polyphony can be emphasised, in which the chorus as amplification cannot be reduced to a euphoric or automatic affirmation of

the speakers. In this respect, however, the human microphone is neither 'human' nor 'microphone'. It is not a microphone because it does not rely on variations in voltage to render a source as faithfully as possible while suppressing background noise. Rather, it facilitates the multiple, the multiplication of voices, and at the same time it produces 'background noise' instead of suppressing it. The purpose is then not (only) to render linguistic material as accurately as possible, not a pure reproduction of linguistic content, but rather a continual unfolding of the enunciation.

The human microphone lacks not only the central characteristics of a microphone—it is also not 'human'. Emphasising humanness would lose sight of social-machinic relations out of which the enunciations of the multiple emerge. The multiplication of voices modulates the spoken content to a polyvocal murmur. At first it is surely the many voices that make an effort at amplifying one voice. But the question is not just of the voices of distinct individuals compounding to an understandable and linguistically as unequivocal chorus as possible. It is also of the blurring of author and audience, on the backdrop of a new schizo-competency, an inventive, machinic subjectivity that ultimately engenders multitasking between reception, repetition and enunciation of one's own position. As in the day-to-day post-Fordist production, traversed by all sorts of polyphonic, polyvocal and polyaffective lines, there is quite a disarray, in which all happens at the same time. We can concurrently hear, repeat and take a stand.

The one never enters into an exchange with the multiple as unity, as identity. The one as a whole is only ever subtracted. There is a relation between the multiple and the one only when the one appears as a singular that is then no longer subtracted from the infinite-multiple. Singularities interact with the multiple as components of a monstrous com-position in which the single voices produce polyphony not by concurring, but by being attuned each in their own way. This applies also to the practice of the micro-amplification of the human microphone.

It can happen that the chorus whose voices speak the same turns out to be radically polyvocal and differentiated. One voice supports the speaker with gestures of the hands, another

expresses its dissensus with other gestures even as it repeats the last sentence of the speaker, while the third has turned away from the speaker in order better to fulfil its amplifying function for the bystanders.

Becoming-many: spreading in all dimensions, uncountable
In the course of the expansion of the Occupy movement the process of the human microphone was applied to ever larger assemblies, in several consecutive waves of repetition, up to five of them, a truly massive amplification. Even in the moving mass rally the new practice of the mic check found its spontaneous use in Manhattan. But it would be wrong to explain the emergence and spread of multiplicity in the logic of counting by addition and quantitative increase. Multiplicity is not made 'by always adding a higher dimension, but rather in the simplest of ways, by dint of sobriety, with the number of dimensions one already has available — always n–1'.[5] The foundation of the production of multiplicity lies just as much in overcoming the additive logic of counting (up) as in rejecting the one, which emerges only in the (dis-)counting from the multiplicity.

One of the most important mouthpieces of the Occupy movement was a New York–based magazine by the name of *n+1*. It arose from the old necessity of political engagement of intellectuals and has attempted since 2004 to link cultural and literature critique with topical questions on the 'intellectual situation'. In 2011 the publishers of the magazine also issued several semi-regular issues of the newspaper *occupy*. With the involvement of cultural criticism in activist practices *n+1* has doubtlessly contributed to the diversity of the New York occupation movement. But in terms of making multiplicity, the practice and title of the magazine, *n+1*, are problematic. Just like the magazine cannot do without the classic centrality of the intellectual in the grid of representation, it remains caught in conventional thinking about the spread and concatenation of experience, knowledge and intellect. Against all the experience of instrumentalisation of media intellectuals as a function of the mass media they continue fostering the idea of intellectuals as the source of knowledge and the media as a means of transporting this knowledge to the masses.

With the code $n+1$ a false multiplicity is constructed, a 'multiplicity' in the logic of countability, whose propagation functions in terms of the addition of units. Such a logic developing in $n+1$ derives from the figure one, and one can be added to it. Multiplicity however is precisely not made up of units, but consists in singular dimensions that spread in movable directions. Singularities and multiplicity, components and composition are then co-emergent, equiprimordial or entirely without origin, while units emerge only once discounted from the multiplicity by subtraction. Just like the multiple 'has' no subject, it also has no object.

The occupation movements seize on the experience of a critique of representation and of non-representational practices of the last decades. They invented the slogan 'Occupy everything! Demand nothing!' and make no demands, even as the representatives of representation in politics and media demand this of them ever more insistently. They turn against all forms of representation, including the primacy of the face and the name. They have opted for remaining faceless, rather a multiplicity of faces, not to establish intellectuals as voices of the movement, rather a transversal intellect, not to produce visibility in the mainstream media, rather a multiple visibility in the many forms of post-media ecology.

With all this, the problem of propagation remains, and with it the old question: how can there be more of us? But the question is put wrong to begin with. Starting out with a 'we', we always end up with the question of majority. Being-more in the sense of a majority is the wishful thinking and target point of a linear imagining of propagation via sender and receiver, knowledge production and reception, representatives and represented. It is only by turning from the question of *majority* and *being-more* to that of *becoming-many* that the dominant logic of the $n+1$ can be transformed into a rejection of identification and representation, into $n-1$.

Becoming-many always takes place in the dimensions of the multiple. The majority has no role to play in these dimensions. And even the 99 per cent do not constitute a majority here, not even those 146 per cent the Moscow philosopher Alexei Penzin ironically wrote about in connection with the Russian election fraud in December of 2011, which turned the

frail fledgling of Occupy Moscow into a veritable social movement. In a post-media ecology multiplication and propagation is not to be understood as the addition of one to another, but mainly in the mode of machinic-monstrous contagion. This is where the media lose their quality as the centre in a linear process of representation from production to reception. The middle is the multiple itself. From it the multiple grows and spreads. It is no longer a question of target-group objects to be 'addressed' through mass media with the greatest possible outreach and their author-subjects, but that of the production of a completely different middle here and now, the rampant torrent in the middle of the multiple. Media are not just a means here. They take part in the production of sociality and become in a new sense *social* media. These forms of social media defy any simple instrumentalising as a coupling between active and passive, between production and reception. Think of the praxis in Cairo by which a multitude of video activists placed their pictures on YouTube and other web channels, and these clips were then brought back as screenings to Tahrir Square and later into many decentralised places in Cairo. The multifaceted video production and presentation goes beyond the purely defensive technique of documenting police assaults and state repression, and becomes a multiperspective production of images and sounds, a process of production of the social. Or think of the live streams from the assemblies since the university occupations, from the *asambleas* and *general assemblies*. They become a revolutionary reality TV and create despite all the triviality, often even ridiculousness of the picture of banal discussion processes, a new idea of transparency of the political.

Post-media sociality emerges in the various forms of the production of expression, not in the separation of virtual/media and real/corporeal. The precarious bodies on the occupied squares, the human microphone, the live streams and social networks are components of one and the same make-up, just as media, im-media(te), post-media as they are real. Body machines, social machines and technology machines interlink in entirely different ways than in the socio-narcissistic hustle and bustle of Facebook and co.

Post-media sociality: n−1 vs Facebook revolution

A new quality in the trade of product marketing has been reached, as products no longer need to be praised and sold as revolution by PR companies, but by the revolution itself, from within it. Facebook was fortunate enough to make this experience as the Arab revolutions were being marketed as Facebook revolutions.

Besides being a media tool for revolutions, a means of self-representation, communication and manic exposure of life, Facebook is primarily the undeletable storage of millions of private data sets, a business model for the exploitation of unwaged labour, a medium for selling data primarily for the economic goals of others, a medium of forced confessions, of coercion to 'de-privatise'. This coercion relies on the yearning towards the light of virtual sociality, on the urgency of visibility that comes along with a new imagining of privacy as deficient. Indeed the concept of the private has always carried in itself a deficiency, a lack, a being-deprived. In antiquity it was a lack of office, a lack of public view, a lack of opportunities to act politically. However, in the sociality of contemporary social media, privacy becomes a problem because it implies invisibility, economic imperceptibility and a decoupling from the lifeblood of the social networks.

One could take this problem seriously and in this respect forcibly enact at all levels a practice of resistance based on a radically affirmative strategy of deprivatisation, publicising, becoming-public. But one could also, conversely, say that an offensive becoming-invisible, becoming-imperceptible, decoupling represents a much-needed mode of subjectivation, a form of desertion from the socio-narcissistic frameworks of our times. There is probably a need for the invention of forms of vacillating, of concatenating, of traversing these two models.

In any event it is not appropriate to the post-media situation to fall back on prevalent and linear conceptualisations of the relation between sociality and media that conceive of the former being induced by the latter. Surely the 'Arab Spring' was not simply induced by the media, just like the occupation of squares and assemblies of 2011 were not alone responsible for the boom of social media that year. In this sense not much remains of concepts like 'the Facebook revolution' besides the

above-mentioned marketing aspect on the one hand, and the crudely pragmatic aspect of the instrumentalising of Facebook and Twitter for purposes of mobilisation on the other, as tactical theft of capitalistically marked media. Both interpretations fail to account for the quality of the social-machinic make-up that characterises post-media sociality today.

This social-machinic quality has no subject, no object: it develops in the entanglement of media and sociality, in the tumultuous middle of the multiple. It needs self-organised networks and their social, free software, which explore new paths both technically and at the level of organisation. Such a network has been in existence for the Spanish-speaking spaces for about four years, under the name, hard to believe, $n–1$, at the address n-1.cc. A techno-political dispositif that aims at radically extending the possibilities of media and sociality, in a self-organised way, horizontally, for and from the bases. From the perspective of $n–1$ counter-information, activist research and dissident knowledge production require a different quality of data protection, but also different technical principles of social interaction. This means at the same time greater privacy and tools for social exchange, more self-control over one's own data and greater technical reliability than the commercial providers of the Web 2.0 could offer.

Created as a new social network by hackers and political activists, $n-1$ first aims to enable an exodus from the narcissistic circles of Facebook. The closed system of Facebook with its techniques of dividualising desire is to be evacuated. Admittedly, exodus does not here mean a total rejection. Many of the activists use $n-1$ for political exchange and at the same time continue to have a Facebook account for personal communication. The broad viral mobilisation for 15-M between February and May 2011 was achieved largely via Facebook, Twitter and Youtube. $n-1$ as a new network remained for years no more than an insider tip. With 15-M and the movement '*democracia real ya!*' this changed abruptly. Albeit even now $n–1$ does not reach the membership levels of Facebook, but in the course of 2011 the number of users rose to more than forty thousand. The word is out. In an intermediary position between self-determined publishing and just as self-determined practices of becoming-invisible it is possible

to develop a different sociality than in the socio-narcissistic networks structured by economic interests.

Post-media sociality arises precisely in the non-linear, mixed practices between squares, streets, assemblies and media spaces. Connecting to many machines does not necessarily mean being dependent on them. Sociality arises precisely in the interstices of social, media and body machines. Making the multiple means to concatenate these machines instead of hooking them up to the apparatuses of the one. Rejection of the molar block, rejection of the united front, rejection of the counting/subtracting and of the unified subject. $n-1$.

Notes

1   *Translated by Alain Kessi.*
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2   Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 6.
3   Ibid.
4   Ibid., 17.
5   Ibid., 6.

Operational Aesthetics

Lucy Orta

Introduction

This chapter coincides with the twenty years of my practice
as a contemporary artist, so it seems fitting that I cover the
evolution of my work after having left the Parisian fashion
industry, through founding Studio Orta with my partner and
husband, Jorge, in 1991, and its development into a large
team of interdisciplinary artists and theorists committed to
creating and communicating with an artistic format that is
both representational and operational, Operational Aesthetics
(*Aesthetic en Fonctionement*).[1]

 Although Jorge and I both have solo practices—Jorge
throughout the difficult dictatorial years in Argentina between
1970 and 1982 and in Paris from 1983, and my own since
1992—we have always worked collaboratively, provoked by the
same key questions:

> How can art practice pave a new critical role, faced with
> the growing problems in this world?

> How can it erase the contradictions between formal
> aesthetics and social function?

> How can works of art empower and nurture constructive
> dialogue?

> What contribution can we as artists make to human and
> environmental sustainability?

Our artwork is widely exhibited in galleries and museums
worldwide, but these public presentations represent just
a fraction of our multifaceted studio production and

communication processes. We strive to create artistic forms that 'speak' different visual languages within varying contexts and for diverse audiences, be it within the confines of the white cube or the intimacy of the home, the playground of the public space or interacting with the wider community.

We employ a huge diversity of media — from drawing, print, embroidery and couture, to welding, carpentry, silkscreen printing, installation, glass blowing, architecture, intervention, light projections, sound, performance, photography and video — but we are conscious that the vast array of resulting artefacts cannot just represent our complex and changing epoch. On the contrary, they should be active within people's lives, reactive to and act as trigger catalysts for solutions for society at large.

I: Portable architecture

Just as I was beginning to make a successful career in the Parisian couture houses, the first Gulf War exploded, followed by stock market crashes and the consequences of the devastating economic recession. My encounter with Jorge in Paris in 1991 triggered my gradual transition away from fashion design into contemporary art, inspired by his work and an increasing need to become more socially active and to find a new creative medium with which to express the effects of the social instability around me.

The first visual manifestation of my work was *Refuge Wear* (1992–98), a response to dual global crises: the humanitarian aid appeals for shelter and clothing for the Kurd refugees fleeing the war zones, and the increasing numbers of homeless people on the streets of Paris. The first sculpture I realised was *Habitent* (1992), a portable habitat designed for minimum personal comfort and urgent mobility for nomadic populations. Habit implies a garment for meditation and spiritual refuge, the inhabitant suggesting a human presence as an occupant for the dwelling. The aluminium coated one-person tent with telescopic armatures transforms in a matter of seconds into a wind-waterproof poncho.

Using my design expertise, I went on to explore further individual convertible shelters. The forms allow for the minimum vital space around the body and the materials used

1   Lucy and Jorge Orta
     Life Nexus—The Gift, 2002/2010

2   Lucy and Jorge Orta
     Nexus Architecture—Harness, 2007/2010

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are chosen for their 'comfort-seeking' properties, further extending the metaphorical aspect of each artwork. For example, a combination of microporous Rip Stop with a PU-coated polyamide protects against abrasion during mobility, but at the same time takes into account basic physical needs. The *Habit-Bivouacs* (1993–94) incorporate carbon armatures that raise the fabric above the chest to eliminate the effects of claustrophobia. These supporting structures are lightweight and telescopic, evoking pop-up architecture. *Refuge Wear* often has arm or hood appendages and converts into backpacks, or pockets containing both functional and symbolic objects. The transformation from shelter to clothing and vice versa is fundamental to the concept of freedom of movement, free will or choice, new relationships and new cultural exchanges, the *homo mobilis*.

Workshops

In 1993 I was invited to exhibit *Refuge Wear* at the Salvation Army shelter in Paris (*Cité de Refuge*). The show 'Art Social Function!' marked the sixtieth anniversary of the hostel designed by Le Corbusier. On one of the Refuge Wear bivouacs suspended in the entrance hall of the hostel was silkscreen printed text: 'Living without a shelter for prolonged periods rapidly deteriorates physical and moral health. The lack of adequate sleep increases stress, weakens the immune system and accelerates the loss of identity and de-socialisation.'

The artworks became the focal point for discussions with the residents, and so we created a drop-in workshop with the hostel staff to channel their feelings through dialogue, drawing and poetry. This led naturally to a series of Refuge Wear 'trials', which resulted in confessions about residents' homeless experiences and suggestions on how their precarious conditions could be ameliorated with numerous stopgap solutions. These emotional encounters marked a change in my studio practice as it became apparent that workshops were more than just an artist offering a skill. A highly rewarding creative exchange and partnership could be nurtured between participants and artist—co-creation. In the words of the director of the Salvation Army: 'I am convinced today that in the launching of socialisation, it is difficult to have access and

go towards art and culture, they must come towards our public. Culture must be included in the world of exclusion.'[2]

Interventions

As urban theorist and philosopher Paul Virilio has often pointed out, the industrialisation of vision in the modern world has led to the over dominance of images within our society. To be homeless in a media culture such as ours is therefore to be rendered invisible, to melt literally into the margins and framework of the city. 'Out of sight out of mind' is an aphorism that has a more pertinent meaning to those disenfranchised members of society who fall through this gap. Jorge and I staged *Refuge Wear* city appearances—*Interventions*—to challenge that act of social disappearance and to render the invisible visible once more. Peripheral urban spaces, such as squats, railway stations, housing projects, bridges and subways, were chosen as arenas for simultaneous happenings that were recorded for French and British television.[3] The Refuge Wear sculptures and the subsequent interventions in the urban space acted as warnings, alarms or distress whistles to signal certain aspects of reality that the media ignore or simplify, before they evacuate it completely.

Collective

Meeting Virilio in 1994 was a significant turning point in my practice. His research at the time focused on the breakdown of the family unit and the need to reconstruct the social link: 'The precarious nature of society is no-longer that of the unemployed or the abandoned, but of that of individuals socially alone.'[4] The *Refuge Wear* and *Survival Kits* I had been creating were concerned with the notion of individual survival, but it became more apparent that I should be investigating the role of the individual within a community structure—the collective body.

Virilio's philosophy and social criticism encouraged me to explore new structures and processes for stimulating dialogue and interaction. I went on to create *Collective Wear Body Architecture* (1994–99), larger-scale domes and collective tent-like sculptures that sought to promote the opposite effect of the individual isolated units in the *Refuge Wear* series. The

surface skins of these *Body Architecture* enclosures have many facets and appendages—demi-bodies—that represent individuals within a community and at the same time evoke the complexities of sharing space. The first in the series was *Body Architecture × 4* (1994), exhibited at the Musée d'Art Moderne in Paris, installed alongside *Refuge Wear*. In the study *Body Architecture Soweto* (1997) the external membrane of the tent-structure is covered in second-hand clothes, purchased from the community markets in Soweto townships in South Africa during a research trip for a commission for the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale.

Communities
Connector Body Architecture (2001–06) marks the transition from the *Body Architecture* studies and expands the metaphor of community interaction. Jorge and I created *Dome Foyer* (2001), a structure taking the form of a meeting hub, a central axis onto which six to eight bivouac pod units could be zippered on and off. We presented the *Connector Mobile Village* (2002) at the Lothringer 13 gallery in Munich, Germany. The same pods were docked into a connective channel in the form of linear modules, each with a numbered docking bay. The green node allowed different structural configurations and the open-ended possibility to create larger connector networks, replicating the rhizome-like fabric of our community interactions.

The *Connector* project became a fascinating subject for workshops, which we ran simultaneously in different cities and community groups across the world, from Mexico to Japan, from France to Florida. During the workshops, ideas to diversify the habitable pods were developed into prototypes, allowing for huge variety of individual units among the expanding population of this mobile village.

The *Connector Guardian Angel* was created together with ex-voto painters in the Zocalo district of Mexico City, depicting scenes they witness daily in the streets. This segment was commissioned for the annual Historical Festival, which aimed to bring culture to the heart of the Mexico City, where crime and poverty is at its highest density.

The *Makrolab Connectors*, anoraks-cum-sleeping bags,

were a wearable environmental manifesto imagined during a residency on Makrolab—an autonomous travelling research station that relied entirely on sustainable energies, positioned on the environmental reserve Rottnest Island, off the coast of Western Australia. The anoraks are prototypes for crew uniforms, fashioned with thermochromic textiles, silkscreen-printed with an environmental charter. They have an integrated portable solar panel designed to power a mobile phone or laptop. The rucksacks unzip from the jacket and can either attach to walls of the laboratory, doubling up as storage space, or connect back onto the metaphoric *Connector Village* sculpture.

Created during workshops with fashion students in the French town of Cholet, the *Cholet Connector*, with its gestural extending arms, is one of the most pertinent responses to the notion of interconnectivity, extending out to others to feel part of a larger connective social structure: detachable, mobile, yet inextricably connected.

Mobility

Jorge and I also develop itinerant vehicle structures, *Mobile Intervention Units—MIU* (2002, on-going), and we're not alone in addressing the needs of humanity with these kinds of mobile dwelling spaces. A range of artists have been working on the 'containerisation' of living space, exploring the overlaps between architecture and urban planning to realise sculpture as fully self-sufficient and mobile social spaces. Joep van Lieshout's *AVL Projects* are modular living units; Krzysztof Wodiczko *Homeless Vehicles* provide marginalised groups with a 'street tool' to transport the basic necessities of a survival economy. Dré Wappenaar's tents function as dens, attracting a diverse range of people to gather inside and engage with a message of awareness. Andrea Zittel, Alicia Framis, Tobias Rehberger, Jorge Pardo, N55, Plamen Dejanov and Swetlana Heger, to name but a few, are all artists whose work is grounded in the social dimensions of collective action and the understanding of itinerant communities.

Like the goals of the *Connector Mobile Village*, our *MIU* are itinerant civic vehicles that address important issues relating to presence and speech in delivering an itinerant platform for

communities who cannot reach centres of power. Two of our most pertinent works, reconditioned Red Cross ambulances, were positioned in front of the city hall in Trieste, Italy, for the G8 Environment Summit in 2002. The visual imagery and graphic signifiers applied to their façades quite explicitly referenced the combined social and environmental subjects needing urgent attention: the foot-and-mouth epidemic, waste food mountains, water shortage, extreme poverty and much more.

Dwelling X (2004) evolved from a series of co-creation workshops on the theme of personal and shared space held with a local youth group in the city of Nottingham. Responding through drawing and model making, a series of architectural floor plans became a focus for the motifs silkscreened onto an inflatable membrane, alongside the silhouettes of each participant. The balloon-like membrane, synonymous with the womb, becomes the extension of a huge mesh heart, an architectural proposal combining two distinct evocative spaces. Nestling on the lorry in the centre of the busy market square, its diaphanous form acts as a mobile beacon for the new contemporary art museum to be built in the city; at the same time, it provides a public platform for interrogating and engaging with new forms of public and participative art.

Nexus

When I first began making work that physically connected people, Virilo commented: 'Each individual keeps an eye on, and protects, the other. One individual's life depends on the life of the other. In Lucy's work, the warmth of one gives warmth to the other. The physical link weaves a social link.'[5]

The body of work *Nexus Architecture* (1994–2002) (Figures 1 & 2) is regarded as an emblem of my practice. Nexus means link or bond and the symbolic content is more important than functional. In this work clothing becomes the medium through which social links and bonds are made manifest, both literally and metaphorically. The links of zippers and channels, while enhancing the uniformity of the workers' overalls, create androgynous shapes that defy classification by the usual social markers, and attempt to give form to

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the social, not the individual body. As fashion sociologist Dr Joanne Entwistle states: 'Instead of differences, we are offered a powerful vision of possible, momentary collectives or networks of being, whose connections are rendered visible and visceral in time and space.'[6]

The connecting elements are direct embodiments of a social link, a 'social sculpture' worn in public spaces and used for ephemeral interventions in contextual locations. During the interventions performers and passers-by become physically involved in the construction of each scenario, which is filmed and photographed: climbing into the suits, zipping the Nexus, walking, moving in unison, creating an unusual closeness, questioning interdependence by being part of it, physical and visceral. The recurring public manifestations of the work create a poetic series of interrelated segments regardless of religion, sex, age or social status.

The surface fabric of each Nexus suit is adapted to the context of each public intervention, and is silk-screen printed with inscriptions relating to current affairs. A segment of sixteen suits created for the Venice Biennale (1995) were inscribed with newspaper headlines reporting the genocide in Rwanda and worn by architecture students throughout the biennale opening. Participating in the Global March Against Child Labour (1998), teenagers from an orphanage I had worked with communicated the UN Declaration for Children's Rights as they marched across France.

For the 2nd Johannesburg Biennale commission (1999) I chose to use traditional textiles from the colourful Dutch wax prints and African Kangas purchased in South Africa, and this formed the basis for a community workshop for migrant female labourers from a local city shelter. The women were inexperienced in sewing and were given a demonstration on the basic processes of cutting and manufacturing so that each woman could gain a skill. They selected their preferred graphic designs and each cut and stitched a suit. The result was a stunning patchwork series of *Nexus* links, and a moving intervention of solidarity in the city of Johannesburg as we created a magnificent human chain chanting anti-apartheid freedom songs. At the end of the workshop the women adopted the suits for personal use including the social link,

perhaps in their minds the most important feature of the design. In Johannesburg, the *Nexus Architecture* experience produced the most beautiful suits, but more importantly it was a process of bringing forth the possibility of solidarity in a fractured environment where solidarity can be difficult to muster and maintain.

Nexus Architecture later evolved from the linear configuration to a crisscross of connections evocative of the molecular structure of atoms. Several hundred suits existed in this series and the full installation carried an extremely powerful message. This included a gathering of over fifty performers and passers-by in front of Cologne Cathedral to mark the opening of the exhibition 'Unwearable' at the Angewandte Kunst Museum (2000). In the city of Cholet, a city devastated by closures of some children's clothing manufacturing plants, we staged a public intervention to coincide with a survey exhibition at the museum of fine art. Over one hundred local children and their parents participated in workshops led by the museum to learn about the UN Declaration of Children's Rights (2002).

Survival

The Life Guard series (2002, on-going) is based on an adaptation of the worker's overall block. It is used as a starting point for a multitude of different assemblages to create both object-based and performative detournements. The extension of the garment incorporates Red Cross army-surplus articles, camp beds, tarpaulins with their rigid frames and stretchers and bed linens with protruding handles. The first-aid stretchers transform into connected figures, which are both supportive structures for the wearer and transportable aid devices for the bearer. Camp-bed mattresses detach from their frames and morph into sleeping bags, rucksacks convert to multiple habitats and linen tarpaulins mutate into collective harnesses. Even rubber dinghies deploy to create wearable life rafts, and lifejackets pop out of canvas courier bags.

Urban Life Guard formed the central discourse of my exhibition, The Curve, at the Barbican Art Gallery London (2005). Comprising 23 suspended stretcher beds incorporating over sixty figures, I reflected on the notion of assistance and

the assisted, whereby the body is not only understood as the measure of one's capacity to overcome ordeals or support for others in distress, but also as a fragile structure to be preserved.

Portable Protest

Portable Protest (2004–08) is a response to the second Iraq invasion in 2004, and builds upon work that Jorge and I have been developing since the outbreak of the 1991 Gulf War. The work was commissioned by the Victoria and Albert Museum's late night performance evenings to be held on 25 June 2004, just five days before the hand-over of sovereignty to the Iraqi government and the start of the withdrawal of US and allied forces. Together with 50 volunteer performers, we staged a passive protest for peace wearing gold-printed combat suits. For over two hours we silently meditated the future fate of Iraq and its citizens amid the tombs, sepulchres and war trophies from historical battles and combats.

Eyewitness accounts conducted by Dr Jonathan Holmes for the verbatim play *Fallujah*, on which we collaborated and which was performed in 2007, recount the desperation of medical staff, the horrors of combat and the voices of the citizens from inside the siege of this Iraqi city. We became even more anxious to reveal the truth behind this political manipulation and media censorship through our work, so *Portable Protest* and new sculptural works were used as the backdrop for a seven-week performance in London. The independent NGO project 'Iraq Body Count' estimated that over thirty-four thousand civilians were killed in Iraq in 2006 alone, 1.8 million were driven from their homes and over two million fled to other countries. What happens to the people whose livelihoods, homes and daily routines are permanently and irrevocably changed through the violation of their basic human rights in the name of Western democracy?

In keeping with the flexibility of our work, *Portable Protest* also toured in the form of a static installation to the 2006 Gwangju Biennale in South Korea, a city famous for student protests against the dictatorial regime and now a symbol of the country's pro-democracy resistance—a movement with special poignancy in light of the political situation that still divides the peninsula.

II

In this section I focus on four areas of collaborative research, marking the shift away from the body to the global altruistic themes of human rights in the project *Antarctica*, or food and water scarcity explored in the themes of *70 × 7 The Meal* and *OrtaWater*, and the most recent body of work, Amazonia, which interrogates the importance of safeguarding our natural resources.

HortiRecycling

HortiRecycling (1997–99) points a finger at food waste in European cities, yet it is also a reflection on the inequalities of food distribution globally. The works begins its life as *All in One Basket* (1997), an installation of artworks centred around an open-air buffet in Les Halles, Paris, produced from over three hundred kilograms of discarded fruit that we had gleaned from the local markets. We enlisted the help of the famous chef-pâtissier Stohrer, who helped prepare and cook the produce into a variety of gourmet dishes, thereby 're-civilising' this so-called abandoned food. Samples of jam, jellies and puddings were available in small taster bowls for free, and in the adjacent Galerie Saint-Eustache we installed a collection of artefacts constructed from wooden fruit crates containing our homemade preserves, alongside photographs of mounds of discarded market produce. Visitors could buy souvenir editions of our bottled and labelled preserves or listen to personal stories from the community of gleaners at the weekly markets in the form of audio recordings from the Walkmans integrated in conservation unit trolley sculptures. During the course of the opening, thousands of members of the art community, shoppers, children, tramps and students stopped by to discuss both art and food issues.

Two years later we staged a second phase of *HortiRecycling* (1999) in Vienna, thanks to a commission for the Weiner Secession. Taking advantage of the proximity of the local fruit and vegetable Naschmarkt opposite the gallery, the energetic Secession curators helped us carry on the legacy of the Viennese manifesto, 'to every age its art and to art its freedom'.[7] After reflecting on the cycle of food recycling, we perfected our methods of collection, processing and distribution to provide

market vendors with brightly coloured collect units. This enabled a rapid and more hygienic gathering of produce, instead of collecting it directly off the street. At the end of each market day we fetched the bags using our specially fabricated processing units (mobile kitchens) and pulley systems installed inside the gallery. Thanks to these functional sculptures with fully integrated sinks, hotplates and freezers, we were able to clean, cook, bottle and freeze the ripe food on the spot, thereby putting into place a novelty recycling system with the potential to be adopted one day.

70 × 7

Following the success of the social gatherings and the passionate discussions ensuing from the open-air buffets, we developed a third phase of these gastronomic works in the form of an unfolding series of meal performances: 70 × 7 *The Meal* (2000, ongoing). This participative body of work is inspired by Padre Rafael Garcia Herreros (Colombia, 1909–1992), who initiated a series of benefit banquets called *El Minuto de Dios* to fundraise for a major urban social development programme that would radically transform one of the most abandoned zones in the city of Bogotá. The dinners were so successful that they raised enough funds to build El Minuto de Dios, a whole district complete with community schools, homes and gardens, a theatre, a contemporary art museum, small factories and a university.

The symbol 70 × 7 has its roots in the biblical signification meaning *Ad Infinitum* (Lc. 17.4) that serves as a pretext to bringing about multiple encounters between guests, who are invited to dine in surprising installations and participate in an 'endless' banquet. Seven guests invite seven others, and so on, so the act of creating the meal happens through the chain-reaction of human interaction. We are merely triggers or enablers in a process.

70 × 7 *The Meal* series is an invisible artwork taking the form of our most cherished rituals and mimicking the essential human needs to eat and to unite. Only small signals, such as the limited edition Limoges porcelain plates and hand-printed tablecloth created for each event, leave a trace that something unusual has brought these guests together.

We hope that these clues remain discreet so as not to incite a 'fear of art' and to allow the catalyst encounters to blossom naturally. Setting the meals in an urban space is a return to the need for spontaneous general assemblies around specific subjects, bringing people to concert, to reconcile, to reflect together, with the potentiality of an artwork that is active in the heart of a community. The invisibility of the art renders this tool more effective by erasing the fear of 'not belonging'.

One of the most successful of these community gatherings was 70 × 7 *The Meal, act IV* (2000). This was staged in Dieuze, France, a rural town of three thousand inhabitants with a culturally divided population of air force servicemen, miners, farmers, immigrants and unemployed. Commissioned by the local youth centre and in collaboration with seven local associate groups, we contacted every inhabitant in the town using word of mouth, press, radio and door-to-door mailings to encourage the largest possible participation. We closed the main street and installed a half-kilometre table, adorned with a red runner. Special limited-edition Royal Limoges plates were inscribed with the hopes and wishes of the inhabitants, which had been collected during the 18-month period prior to the event. Its success was marked by a tremendous turnout— over half the population and over seven hundred and fifty porcelain dining plates sold on the day!

What started out as an intimate dinner for seven members of the farming community at the Kunstraum in Innsbruck (2000) has evolved through 32 meals installations across the world with thousands of people involved in the act of creation. Our fiftieth act, covering several miles of streets starting from Tate Modern and running across the Millennium Bridge to Guildhall, the historical centre of London, hasn't been realised yet, but from past experience, and with our 70 × 7 multiplication strategy, we know it is possible to unite several thousand people around the same table. Each act of the meal has served as a forum for proposing new political, educational, social and environmental debate, as well as fund-raising for important social or environmental causes. Nobody can change the world with a meal, but each meal, and its infinite accumulations, has the potential to change the world, even if it's in a small way.

Ortawater

This body of work began its life as an exhibition proposal titled 'Drink Water', commissioned by the Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa for the Venice Biennale (2005), which toured to the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen Rotterdam (2006). The initial premise was Venice, a city built on water and dependant on it for its livelihood, but more importantly our research process and resulting artefacts were designed to focus our attention on the general scarcity of water, and the issues surrounding the privatisation and corporate control affecting access to clean water for all.

Starting from an analysis of this crucial issue through visual and textual research, together with international interdisciplinary workshops and seminars, we collectively brainstormed ideas for sculptures, large-scale installations, public artworks and pilot projects that would both evoke the cycle of water and prompt ideas to design and implement clean-water projects for communities in need. Catalogued in sketchbook format, the resulting drawings aimed to pose questions through the surprising juxtaposition of hand-made structures, and the incorporation of functional found objects referencing a wide range of water issues. We reflected on cycles of water from the source to the pump, from the purifica-tion to the packaging and distribution. We created small *MIU* urban vehicles, such as the Ape Piaggio, low-cost manpowered distribution structures and water reservoirs, mobile water fountains, Venetian-style transport trolleys, vitrines, boats and water *Life Guard* artefacts, which oscillate between the metaphoric and the functional/operational.

Fluvial Intervention Unit (FIU)

The hundreds of low-cost water purification devices we discovered during our research were of particular significance. We went as far as incorporating a fully-functioning filtration system into the *FIU Pumpstation* sculpture, which pumped the filthy Canal Grande into the immaculate Venetian gallery, through a filter circuit of connecting pipes in the artworks directly to the brass taps inserted in each object, to simply dem-onstrate, through the act of drinking, that the filthiest water in Europe is drinkable and available to taste for the thousands

of visitors to the exhibitions. In Rotterdam we pumped the Emmasingel Canal through the rear door of the museum in a network of pipes and bridges that wound their way through the historical fine art galleries, among the Van Eycks and Breugels, into the exhibition space. Once again, the general public could just turn on the taps and take a drink. As the engineer we collaborated with demonstrated, it's not rocket science!

Editions

One of our dilemmas was how to incite people to drink the filthy canal water and partake emotionally in the experience of the water's transformation. 'If it were in a bottle would it please you more!'[8] We drew on the bottled water product of our market system to create limited edition artwork, *OrtaWater* (2005-06): clean water, bottled at source from the canals and available for the general public to take away.

Reflecting on 'Operational Aesthetics', our approach as artists is to contribute proactively to the widening of our understanding of the dilemmas ahead, and of course this is impossible to do alone. We conduct interdisciplinary workshops to engage industry partners with students from art, architecture and design schools across Europe; among the participants are graduates from the University of the Arts London, Fabrica Italy, Design Academy Eindhoven, Willem de Kooning Rotterdam, Delft University, Città dell Arte Italy. The Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum workshop conducted throughout the duration of the exhibition was instrumental in establishing a 'Water for Women' think-tank. This was aimed at improving access to clean water in the community of Bwaba in Burkina Faso, which has no running water and only one aquifer, situated 20 kilometres from the village.

Antarctica

As part of Jorge's project for his representation at the 1995 Venice Biennale, we presented a draft proposal for the Antarctica World Nationality and the proposal for a new Utopia in a project that became know as *Antarctic Village—No Borders* (2006-08). This idea focuses on the only unclaimed landmass on earth, Antarctica, which is governed by the Antarctic Treaty signed by twelve countries in 1959. This

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peace treaty was the first Arms Control agreement established during the Cold War, and it declared this sixth continent as a scientific preserve, establishing the freedom for scientific investigation, an environmental protection zone and a ban on all military activity. Antarctica is a unique, peaceful territory to which we can all aspire, and the *Antarctic Village* represents a place of welcome for those fleeing their countries to escape political and social conflict or environmental catastrophes—a physical embodiment of Marshall McLuhan's 'global village'.

In 2006 we began producing a temporary encampment of over fifty dome-shaped dwellings. Reflecting qualities of nomadic shelters and temporary campsites, the *Dome Dwelling* components were assembled in our studio and hand-stitched together by a traditional tent-maker, with sections of flags from countries around the world together with extensions of clothes and gloves symbolising the multiplicity and diversity of people. The flags and fragments of clothes are silkscreen-printed with motifs proposing a new article for the UN Declaration for Human Rights, *Art 13.3 – No Borders*. This mobile village is a symbol of the plight of those struggling to gain the freedom of movement.

Thanks to a commission by the End of the World Biennale in Ushuaia in 2007, we were able to embark on an expedition to Antarctica, to found the Antarctic Village. At the end of the Austral summer during the months of February–March, we were physically able to install the village in Antarctica, travelling from Buenos Aires aboard the Hercules KC130 flight on an incredible journey. Aided by the logistical crew and scientists stationed at the Marambio Antarctic Base, the ephemeral installation of the first *Antarctic Village* was finally realised in four locations across the continent after twelve years of research and development.

On our return to Europe, we exhibited the dwellings in an important touring survey show at the Hangar Biccoca spazio d'arte in Milan, Italy, and the Galleria Continua Le Moulin in Paris, and were given the opportunity to create many more artworks in the Antarctica series.

Drop Parachutes and Life Line
Drop Parachutes (2008, ongoing) is an extension of the

Survival Kits (1995). The pieces resemble mini drop-parachutes using fragments of the textiles left over from the domes. As in many other works, we find an explicit reference to the tools and objects of emergency rescue missions. In this case, the model is the kind of parachute utilised by humanitarian expeditions to rapidly distribute vital supplies.

The Life Line (2005, on-going) life jackets refer to both physical-material rescue and symbolically to the spiritual needs of man. Employing materials such as steel, textile, silkscreen print and assemblage, the combination of found utilitarian or personal objects suspended from handcrafted steel frames reference the recovery of a lost social dimension, such as affection or solidarity.

Antarctica World Passport

No country is complete without its identity document, and so we have imagined the *Antarctica World Passport* that can be delivered from the Passport Delivery Bureau (2008, ongoing). The bureaux are constructed from the makeshift furniture and supplies we collected along our journeys, and a passport is distributed during special events that aim to raise awareness of issues affecting a freer, international migration.

The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 13, currently states that the inherent dignity of every member of the human race and their equal and inalienable rights constitute the fundamentals of liberty, justice and peace in the world. However, it does not mention the freedom to move, or to cross borders. If we were to amend this article we could take into consideration the rights of the hundreds of millions of men and women hunted from their native lands by economic ruin, war and political intimidation. The passport serves as a testament to this reflection and here we find a new article to perhaps be adopted one day:

> Article 13.3: Everyone has the right to move freely and circulate beyond the state borders to a territory of their choice. No individual should have an inferior status to that of capital, merchandise, communication or pollution that traverse all borders.[9]

From the days of the rudimentary analogue data-collection that was employed for the first passport distribution at the Hanger Bicocca, and thanks to an ongoing collaboration with a visual arts program at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, we now have an online database where you can log in to receive a passport in return for your adherence to the basic principles of human rights. Each *Antarctica World Passport* distributed is an extra citizen in the database and an extra voice. The first edition of ten thousand passports is printed, and with five thousand distributed so far we have a huge potential to harness a powerful lobbying force.

Inspired by the motto of the End of the World Biennale, 'Here, at the end of the world, is another world possible?', *Antarctica* is a driving force in this dream.

Amazonia

Our most recent body of work is *Amazonia*. This was commissioned by the contemporary art program at the Natural History Museum in London to coincide with the International Year of Biodiversity in 2010. As part of the research leading up to the exhibition we embarked on a second expedition, this time to the Peruvian Amazon. In terms of species diversity the Amazonian rainforests surpass all other forests in the world. A single hectare plot easily contains more than two hundred and fifty tree species and fifteen hundred species of higher plants. The region is home to about 2.5 million species of insects, tens of thousands of plants, and some two thousand birds and mammals.[10]

Organised by Cape Farewell, an artist-run, non-profit body dedicated to communicating the effects of climate change through arts–science collaborations, we travelled with a group of artists and scientists from the Environmental Change Institute (ECI) at Oxford University. This four-week journey took us 4,500 metres up to the Glacier Salcantay, down to 3,500 metres to the Cloud Forest tree line and the science station Wayqecha, down the Andes to 1,500 metres along the Trocha Union, the infamous Inca path through the rainforest, to the Amazon Basin to the tributary river, the Madre de Dios. We navigated a 350 kilometre stretch of Amazon forest, stopping in science stations in the Manú Biosphere Reserve, a UNESCO

world-heritage site where the highest rate of biodiversity in the world is recorded, to our final departure from Puerto Maldonado. As part of the research, we participated in various scientific data-collection research programs and at the same time recorded this beautiful oasis of diversity through photography, video and sound. The Manú region proved to be an emotional and conceptual starting point for new work that we hoped would restore our focus on the world around us — both its beauty and its imperilled state. On our return to Paris, we began imagining an installation for the exhibition comprising 2-D and 3-D work as well as audio and film.

Drawings

The drawings *Amazonia Expedition Sketchbook* are a reflection on our first impressions of and responses to the journey. The works on paper conceptualise the experience of the Amazon and our understanding of the connections between us and the natural environment. We are part of nature and the iconography in the drawings playfully depicts the mutual dependency. But in fact we are more dependent on nature than nature is on us — our presence brings about nature's decline and human decline with it, unless we choose to change and find solutions to these local and global problems by placing us within nature, not outside it.

Sculpture

Life on our planet is in constant flux. There has been life on earth for 3.5 billion years. Since then there have been five mass extinctions, which caused changes on earth. Extinctions are a natural part of life, but the current rate of loss is about one hundred to a thousand times what it should be. This decline in plants, insects, birds, amphibians, sea-life and other living organisms has become known as the sixth mass extinction, and has one distinguishing characteristic: it is caused by humans.[11]

Using this as a starting point and drawing from the collaborations with researchers in the paleontology department of the Natural History Museum, larger-than-life aluminium sculptures, titled *Bone Variation*, are modelled on fossilised dinosaur bones from the museum's collection. Despite their

colourful, iridescent finish, they remain relics of death, a reminder of the many forms of life that have been shaped through evolution, giving us a tangible sense of the contemporary and of times past.

In contrast, the works *Collection: Aepyornis, Gallimimus, Allosaurus, Palaeomastodon* are delicate sculptures made of fragile porcelain casts from actual specimens in the Natural History Museum collection and imprinted with tiny fragments of life: the egg from the elephant bird Aepyornis, the limb bones from dinosaurs Gallimimus and Allosaurus, and the elephant ancestor Palaeomastodon. Bones are *memento mori*, reminders of death, but the egg is birth, the start of life. The flowers, butterflies and insects that populate these works point to the cycle of life and the beauty and wealth of our planet. There is an underlying melancholy of the end of time, and the hot breath of extinction. Seeing ourselves as occupying a moment in time, through the reflection of the mirrored surface of the glass plinths, allows us to question our arrogance over nature and the need to work with it rather than against it.

Photography

The Manú Biosphere Reserve became an important visual focus for the photographic installation *Perpetual Amazonia (MLC | one-metre-square | S12 48 21.6 W71 24 17.6)*. Partaking in the scientific research in Manú, we mapped out a one-hectare plot of rainforest and recorded the plant species, the height and diameter of trees that are monitored for the purposes of ecological and climate research. We captured in photography every flower we encountered, enhancing the hidden details such as a stamen, pistil, seed pod, crushed petal or minuscule insect, and continued this photographic methodology during our travels elsewhere, adding to an important database of plant species from around the world. Back in the studio we edited a series of images to which the GPS coordinates in the title and on each photograph refer. We then divided the hectare into ten thousand subplots, each marked with its plot reference and UTM coordinate denoting the exact location of the metre-square plot in the Amazon.

Each photograph is for sale and is accompanied by a 60-year certificate of moral ownership decreeing the rights

to protect the plot and its biodiversity, to contribute to the research and at the same time an obligation to pass on the accumulated knowledge to a second generation. This artwork poses many complex questions about ownership, indigenous land rights and the common rights of this natural heritage — we know that land is being expropriated or compulsorily purchased from indigenous populations for exploitation of natural resources and we all know the effects of this daily devastation. In the past 50 years, a third of the world's rainforests have been felled and burned and the UN convention on biological diversity states that in the last eight thousand years about 45 per cent of the earth's original forest cover has disappeared, cleared mostly during the past century! Or as E.O. Wilson so eloquently states: 'Destroying rainforest for economic gain is like burning a Renaissance painting to cook a meal.'

As it was not possible for us to sell the photographs in the Natural History Museum, we proposed a public engagement project for the visitors who were invited to take a *Perpetual Amazonia* poster and in exchange make a contribution to preserve in perpetuity the metre-square plot it represents and, in doing so, become a steward of the Amazon rainforest. The posters are an extension of the notion of Relational Aesthetics[12] — they are freely acquired yet engage an active participation; at the same time we prompt the audience to reflect on how we value a hectare of forest, because the loss of nature has a price! With over forty-one thousand visitors to the NHM exhibition, over eight thousand posters were distributed and we raised more than £4,000 for research in the Amazon. Even we are surprised with the achievement — this emulates the theory of Operational Aesthetics. *Amazonia* has marked an important transition in our practice, which is not only aesthetic. It has become a state of mind through which we strive to revive our deep enjoyment of nature and to convey its value to our daily lives and to our survival.

Notes

1   N. Bourriaud and G. Williams eds, *Lucy Orta* (London: Phaidon Press, 2003).
2   P. Ardenne and D. Lebaillif eds, *Art Fonction Sociale!* (Paris: Cité de Refuge Paris, 1993).
3   *Cercle de Minuit*, France 2, France, 1996; *Dazed & Confused*, Channel 4, United Kingdom, 1998.
4   P. Virilio and L. Orta eds, *Refuge Wear* (Paris: Editions Jean-Michel Place, 1996).
5   Ibid.
6   J. Entwistle, *Refuge Wear and Nexus Architecture*, exhibition catalogue (Havana: 9th Havana Biennale, 2006)
7   Phrase carved above the entrance of the Weiner Secession, founded in 1897 by artists Klimt, Moser, Hoffmann, Olbrich, Kurzweil, Wagner and others.
8   Advertising slogan for bottled water in an Italian magazine, 2005.
9   See <http://antarcticaworldpassport.mit.edu>.
10   15th Conference of Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, Copenhagen, 2009.
11   B. Arends ed., *Amazonia*, exhibition guide (London: Natural History Museum, 2011).
12   N. Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2002).

Participatory Cultures and Participatory Public Space

Scott McQuire

I

I often ride to work through a large park in inner-city Melbourne. It's a longer route but more peaceful, as it gets me off the overcrowded roads. At one point, there is a dirt trail about fifty metres long that I use to traverse the space between two paved paths. It's an example of what architects call 'desire lines'—user-created pathways where formal ones don't exist, or don't fit the inhabitants' preferred patterns of use. We see desire lines in cities all the time, particularly in the kind of abandoned or undefined sites Nikos Papastergiadis calls 'parafunctional' spaces.[1]

What interests me about this particular path is, first, that it's a collectively made artefact existing in public space. Second, that it is not static but has shifted over time. As a small tree near one junction has grown, it has gradually come to obstruct the path. As a result, riders gradually began to veer a bit wider at this point. For a time—in fact a period of several months—there were two distinct paths. Now, the original path has become impossible to use and only a faint trace remains.

Both the formation of the path and the process of its realignment are worth considering in the context of what I'm calling 'participatory public space'. They offer a model of self-organised, collective action undertaken by a dispersed group who don't know each other personally and, in fact, have never met together in person. The dirt path has come into being because different riders have decided to take a short-cut; over time the path inscribed by their wheels signals the possibility of a different route to others, who in turn reinforce it by riding it. This process of collective attunement is foregrounded in

the alteration of the path's trajectory. No one was formally charged with making a decision about changing the path's alignment. Rather, different users collectively responded over time to changes in the environment, spurred by a desire to keep the route's amenity while respecting the growth of the tree. It's the kind of simple action that occurs commonly. Yet it shouldn't be simply passed over. This supple, collectively produced alteration to the path stands in marked contrast to the likely situation if this was an official, paved — and therefore fixed — path that needed modification. Once the problem of an obstruction was identified, someone would probably have been charged with cutting off the offending branch. It's quite possible they would simply cut the whole tree down. Either way, it is likely it would have taken thousands of dollars to formulate, plan and complete the job. Instead, a better result has been achieved for 'free' by a distributed form of collective *public* action.

II

In one of his early essays on urban space Guy Debord advocated putting switches on streetlights. It's a suggestion I love, not so much for its practicality, but for its capacity to provoke us to rethink how much we take it for granted that large swathes of our public environment remain outside our control. Perhaps this is a good thing with street lighting. But there are many other areas where we don't seem to have the balance right between top-down and bottom-up action.

In a famous essay first published in 1968, Henri Lefebvre addressed the urban question in terms of what was dubbed the 'right to the city'.[2] For Lefebvre the right to the city is not about extending the purview of representative government, nor about codifying urban space in terms of formal rules and obligations, but concerns the right to participate in and collectively shape the environment we inhabit. Contrary to the top-down ethos of centralised planning and governance that had dominated modern urbanism, Lefebvre argued that the capacity for a city's inhabitants to actively appropriate the time and space of their surroundings was a critical dimension of modern democracy. Lefebvre's thought has been immensely influential, and some of his concepts, including

the contention that all space is socially produced space, have become almost axiomatic in contemporary urban planning. However, this is not to say that all the lessons of his distinctive blend of Marxism and a critical phenomenology of everyday life have been fully understood or embraced. Recently, prominent Marxist social theorist David Harvey revisited Lefebvre's concept of the right to the city, arguing that it 'remained one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights'.[3]

In this chapter, I want to begin to redress this neglect, approaching it from a particular point of view by considering the role of media art in producing a more participatory public space. This involves two related steps. First, I want to repose Lefebvre's concept in the context of the networked city. How should we think the right to the *networked* city, the city of ubiquitous information access, of context-aware data, pervasive sensor systems, and the like? Second, I want to consider the role artists might play in helping reimagine the right to the networked city, broadening it from the frequently narrow and often frightening visions of an instrumentally oriented 'smart city' that have become an all too common urban future.

Of course, 'participatory public space' has a ring of tautology to it: after all, as the pin-up example of collectively produced media, Wikipedia, reminds us, public space is defined by the fact that is 'open and accessible to all citizens'. But this ideal has rarely, if ever, been realised in practice. As Lefebvre's formulation reminds us, public space is a striated, contested zone of action with both visible and invisible barriers. Participation in public space has always had to be thought on a variety of levels, from formal laws regulating access and behaviour to decisions made in the realm of architecture and urban design that establish physical parameters to the way the capacities of individual subjects are shaped by socioeconomic distinctions and cultural protocols. All these factors combine to influence a person's sense of belonging or not belonging in a public space, impacting on their confidence to occupy and act in particular spaces, or, conversely, to avoid them, and to withdraw from social engagement.

In the twenty-first century we need to add the impact of digital networks to this mix. Digital communication infrastructure exerts a growing salience on public space, shaping

not only its ambiance but its social dynamics. This has been driven by two key changes in contemporary media:

1. The diversity of sites in which media can now be accessed, as a range of embedded and mobile platforms supplement the older urban media geography based on relatively limited fixed sites of access.

2. The growing utilisation of place sensitive content and context-aware applications enabled by common incorporation of GPS systems

These changes underpin the emergence of new practices of urban communication and have become increasingly important to the exercise of social agency in public — for instance, the capacity to decipher and navigate the city, to organise, and to act, alone or in concert with others. It's from this perspective that I want to pose the question of *participatory* public space precisely at the intersection of urban space and media space, where we witness the increasing and ambivalent imbrication of social life with complex technical networks. How does this transform the older and better-known power-geometries of the city, force-lines named in terms of class, gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity? Is the composition of public culture becoming more differentiated and complex? Are there new emergent possibilities for participation? Or are old stratifications being further consolidated?

III

In addressing such questions here, I will argue that artists can play a key role, not as *de facto* sociologists or anthropologists, but by initiating modes of practice that take networked public space as the site for enacting experimental forms of communication and cooperation. Over the last decade and a half artists and activists have frequently challenged dominant uses of digital networks, by problematising the default settings of spectacle and surveillance, and by inventing new protocols, interfaces and alignments of technologies, spaces and bodies. This has been part of a broader shift in thinking about art: a move away from the paradigm of re-presentation, in which

the art work is always a belated response to a social situation, to a new paradigm in which art can play a role in *intervening* in ongoing social dynamics. This is not to reduce art to a tool for social engineering but to recognise the capacity for art to generate complex models of communication and interaction that are not easily reduced to the classical cybernetic yardstick of efficient transmission. It's in this sense that I read Maurizzio Lazzarato's injunction: 'artists could be seen as communication experts; but this depends less on connections to the patrons than to publics: not so much pop contests but producing work which matters to people'.[4]

There is a particular urgency in exploring these issues in the Australian context, following the federal government's commitment of up to $37 billion of public funding to the construction of a high-speed national broadband network (NBN). As the network has been designed and roll-out begins, it has become the site for numerous arguments concerning cost, model of funding, likely economic impact and so on. Disturbingly few contributions to these public debates come from a cultural perspective, so there has been little thought about how the different models of network architecture, access and governance might contribute to or detract from a richer, more inclusive public culture, one in which the right to the city can be exercised more fully. One of my starting points is to acknowledge that public culture is constantly being re-invented, for better and for worse. A key lesson from Richard Sennett's seminal book *The Fall of Public Man* is not so much his rather pessimistic account of social life in contemporary cities, but his demonstration of the historical mutability of public life, and his insistence that public sociability is not natural but learned.[5] *Civility*, as the modern replacement for feudal bonds built around obligation and deference, is a complex social relation that needs to be experimented with, practiced, and nurtured. It's a theme Sennett returns to in his most recent book, where he argues that complex societies such as those engendered in modern cities require novel forms of social cooperation: 'a demanding and difficult kind of cooperation [that] tries to join people who have separate or conflicting interests, who do not feel good about each other, who are unequal, or who simply do not understand each other'.[6]

If, as Simmel established a century ago, the existential quandary of the modern city is how to develop and sustain a social relation to strangers, Sennett reposes this as the challenge 'to respond to others on their own terms'.[7] A critical element of Sennett's argument—and one that brings the issue of how contemporary art might *activate* public space to the fore—is that responding to this challenge is not just a question of ethical attitude, but is something that requires social *skill*. For Sennett, skill 'emerges from practical activity'. Taking action develops capacities in different ways from purely intellectual responses, shifting understanding from the sometimes restrictive terrain of normative ideals to the more varied and fluid experience of negotiation and collaboration, assertion and deference, where capacity to listen has to be balanced with willingness to speak, and the desire to find common ground exists in an unstable equilibrium with the need to assert points of difference. Art is at home in these kinds of endeavours. Insofar as it opens a space of questioning, doubt and ambiguity, art can not only sketch new models for being together in public, giving an experimental shape to social encounters, but it can also enable individuals to hone cooperative skills through the performative enactment of new forms of social collaboration.

IV

While there's a long and varied history of participatory art, today participation has become a buzzword, much like 'inter-activity' was in the 1990s. Moreover, this flavour has spread much wider than the media/internet sector where its most recent incarnation emerged. In the wake of Tim O'Reilly's influential branding of Web 2.0, we read not only of participatory media and participatory culture, but also participatory education, participatory planning, participatory medicine, participatory urbanism and even participatory business. And of course, that great *non sequitur*, participatory government! It's in this context that 'participatory art' has become a default policy: almost everybody thinks it's a good thing, but there has been relatively little sustained interrogation of what is meant by 'participation'.

One of the pressing questions for the development of

participatory public space is how we might use the sort of principles demonstrated by peer-to-peer (P2P) networks in the broader context of the city. As Benkler argues:

> What characterises the networked information economy is that decentralised individual actions — specifically, new and important cooperative and coordinate action carried out through radically distributed, nonmarket mechanisms that do not depend on proprietary strategies — play a much greater role than it did, or could have in the industrial information economy.[8]

These non-market forms have always existed, but were progressively downgraded in the era of industrial capitalism, predicated on the formative enclosure of the commons and the gradual subjection of more and more areas of social life to the dictates of the market. For Benkler and numerous other analysts, the internet is a game-changer: provision of wider access to low cost communication infrastructure enables the scalar extension of what Benkler calls peer-based commons production to more and more areas, from software to other informational goods and, potentially, beyond. Michel Bauwens elevates this into the potential for evolving a post-capitalist mode of resource allocation and production, seeing in P2P networks the model for a sophisticated and supple social process specifically designed to engender the most widespread participation by *equipotential* participants.[9] There are a number of assumptions embedded in such an argument. First, Levy's notion of 'collective intelligence': the idea that no one knows everything, but everyone knows something, which underpins contemporary practices of crowd-sourced production. Second, while Bauwens acknowledges that P2P systems are not without hierarchy (and this is an area of urgent research), he contends that such structures are more flexible, based on distributed authority and the principle of encouraging the widest possible participation. If this has the flavour of Marx's 'from each according to his means, to each according to his needs' of communism, Bauwens argues against equating P2P production with the 'primitive' communism of an older 'gift economy'. Unlike the social reciprocity of tribal societies,

or the practice of equality matching (repaying individual debts to particular participants), P2P exchanges are conditioned by the scale and complexity of contemporary social life which establishes mutual anonymity as the basis for many social interactions. In this context, abstract systems of trust (such as expert accreditation) and exchange (money, credit) dominate social life. If there is a mode of gift-giving in contemporary P2P exchanges, such as the donation of intellectual labour to software projects, it usually follows a non-reciprocal pathway, in which the gifts are widely distributed in space and time, and any 'returns' are more likely to accrue to others than to the individuals who initiated the exchange.

How might we translate these principles into a networked public environment? How can we develop non-market forms of collaborative interaction that utilise digital networks in order to reconfigure public space by both imagining and enacting new possible models of *being in public*? Does the random and relatively anonymous contributions of P2P production resemble the collective and loosely coordinated action of bike riders altering the alignment of a desire line in a park with which I began this chapter? No one owns the outcome, no single person could produce it without enormous effort, yet all benefit from the intervention. Can digital art in public space support such loosely coordinated, cooperative action between strangers?

V

In order to advance this discussion, I want to offer three examples of work that operates in this space. Over the last twenty years Rafael Lozano-Hemmer has become renowned for his large-scale interactive public art works. He often deploys innovative interfaces, making alternative use of tracking systems and biometric data to enable multiple inputs to a dynamic work. In this regard, Lozano-Hemmer's work offers a signal example of how an artwork might be conceived as a platform capable of sustaining a variety of modes of public participation. Works such as *Body Movies* (2001) are distinctive in allowing for both individual and collective participation, in providing avenues for both physically active and contemplative engagement, and in the way they encourage inventive,

playful choreographies to develop between strangers gathered in public space.

The work I want to focus on here is *Vectorial Elevation* (2010), which was recently reprised for the Vancouver Olympic Games.[10] *Vectorial Elevation* is a work involving a battery of powerful remote-controlled searchlights accessed by members of the public, who can design and initiate temporary light patterns through a web interface. It was first staged in the massive Zocalo Plaza in Mexico City in 2000. *Vectorial Elevation* stands in relation to a long line of 'light architecture' spectacles, which have historically been designed with the aim of exerting maximum impact on the 'masses'. The most infamous example is Albert Speer's 'cathedral of light' created as the context for one of Hitler's rallies. But we could also connect this line to contemporary urban light spectacles, such as the coordinated light shows that animate the Hong Kong skyline nightly as the city's dense network of towers collectively display their LED plumage. *Vectorial Elevation* sought to challenge the centrally controlled nature of such spectacles by using the internet as mechanism for providing public access. In a sense, it took Debord's injunction about putting switches on streetlights literally, and uses network technology to put multiple users' hands on the switch, redistributing social agency in public space. This capacity to enable users to participate in the construction of temporary ambiances on a large scale in the city centre is an important innovation that should not be taken lightly. In Lozano-Hemmer's words: 'I tried to introduce interactivity to transform intimidation into intimacy.'[11]

Distributed control over public lighting certainly disrupts the traditional logic of the urban light show, and it undoubtedly produces a more varied pattern than an 'official' choreography would. But, rather than intimacy, I suspect most visitors to Zocalo Plaza still experienced the work primarily as a spectacle — something they watched with a feeling of awe rather than a strong sense of ownership or control. However, there was another level of participation to the project that it is important to mention: the webpages which archived each design. I'll quote what Rafael told me about the process in 2006:

> The web pages for *Vectorial Elevation* were created automatically for every participant and the comments field was there so that people could personalise their design with dedications, poems, political statements, etc. Those comments fields were completely uncensored, which was quite a feat at the time because the Zapatistas were quite active electronically at that time ... I convinced the politicians that if we censored that then the piece would become only about censorship and that they needed to stop having a paternalistic and condescending view of the general public and trust that they will send interesting texts. Sure enough we had many Zapatista messages (thank goodness for that!) but also marriage proposals, soccer scores, etc. The point being that those comments were an important aspect in the takeover of a public space.[12]

This comment underlines the need for *situated* analyses of particular interfaces and art works: what succeeds in one context cannot necessarily be translated to others. *Vectorial Elevation* assumed a marked political charge in the context of Mexico City, where, among other things, it provided a platform for unconstrained public dialogue that was otherwise hard to find at the time. When *Vectorial Elevation* was repeated in Vancouver, there were a number of modifications, both to the web interface and the way people could participate on site. The website for the Vancouver project reveals the expanded scale of public participation measured in raw number of users, and the work undoubtedly remains an innovative exercise in the collective construction of an ephemeral intervention in a city centre public space. User comments archived in the website reveal the pleasure and the sense of agency that many people experienced when witnessing their own design come to fruition and be projected across the city. However, the more critical *political* edge of the work relating to the open comment field was undeniably — and understandably — less sharp in Vancouver 2010.

It's also worth noting a tension running through this work, which is pertinent to many similar projects. While designed as a 'platform for participation', *Vectorial Elevation* depends on an expensive and complex technological system that

remains quite closed in some respects. Despite the ambition to encourage participation and agency from the audience, conceptualisation and construction of the *platform* takes place largely in their absence, lending a 'black box' element to the work. Lozano-Hemmer is clearly aware of the issue, insofar he regularly includes mechanisms for participants to become aware of how the work is constructed. These mechanisms go beyond documentation of design and technical systems to introduce performative elements that 'reveal' the system at work (such as the regular resetting of the system in *Underscan* so that participants find themselves inside a projected light grid, which is how the tracking system used in the work 'sees' the interaction space). Addressing this tension is a key challenge for contemporary artists using digital media: how to use complex technological interfaces in ways that enable open forms of social interaction, while also expanding public input into the design and formation of the systems themselves.

The second example I want to discuss in this context is Blast Theory's *Rider Spoke*, which was staged in Sydney and in Adelaide in 2007.[13] *Rider Spoke* belongs to the genre of locative media art concerned with annotating physical places with geolocated information. Like other works by Blast Theory, *Rider Spoke* is an open-ended urban game that uses narrative to form an ambulatory artwork. Equipped with a headset and on-cycle computer, participant-cyclists are asked to explore the city. The narrator provides them with cues to seek out certain sorts of places where they are invited to make personal responses to their surroundings and to the narrator's prompts. What is distinctive about the work is the way the responses are then tagged to specific places. Participants can use the customised screen interface to navigate to 'hiding places' where other participants have left their own comments and responses, which can only be heard by someone actually occupying those places.

The work's combination of open-ended movement through the city in conjunction with exploration of participants' emotional and psychic terrain—memories, observations of those around them, reflections on important occasions or emotions—proved highly evocative. While it is a highly individualised work—riders take their journey alone and

the prompts invite personal reflection — it doesn't simply construct a tele-cocoon. Rather than using technology to erect a shield between the user and those around them, thereby privileging communication with familiar others over encounters with proximate strangers, *Rider Spoke* works to create a mesh of relationships over time. How do you respond to someone recounting an intimate experience, or the admission that they feel lonely or vulnerable? Do you offer up your own story or make your own confession? Do you make something up?

At bottom, *Rider Spoke* is a work about trust and intimacy in the digital era. It does not depend on the sort of public confession and strip-mining of intimacy that is the currency of so-called 'reality TV' but operates in a harder to define space somewhere in between personal reverie and public civility. Each story is a 'donation', a gift of experience, but it is not offered to a particular listener. Donations are archived in a database that can only be accessed by participants when they visit that particular location. Here technology enables the distributed coordination of collective actions that combine to alter the social experience of the city, producing an experience of what might be called *ambient* intimacy, akin to the feeling of identification you might get from immersion in a novel, yet different because the 'content' is contributed by particular strangers inhabiting the city around you.

The final example I want to use is some collaborative research I've been involved in using large video screens as an interface for public communication. Of course, large screens tend to be predominantly associated with advertising, or with televising major live events such as sport. However, since the early 2000s, a growing number of screens located in traditional public spaces such as plazas and city squares have been exploring possibilities for more varied programming. In this context we proposed a project to explore the possibilities for using screen infrastructure to construct a temporary and experimental 'transnational public sphere'.[14] What might this mean? Like the publicly situated video screen itself, the project stands at the junction of two ideas of the public sphere: the traditional public sphere rooted in immediate social interactions taking place in physical space, and the modern conception of the public sphere as primarily constituted by a more abstract

media space. In fact, the opposition between immediate and mediated relations should not be pushed too far, as media platforms have always had distinct material geographies while relations of immediacy have equally depended on symbolic resources, notably language, that cannot be reduced to simple distinctions between presence and absence. Nevertheless, it was notable in the 1980s and 1990s that the emergence of digital networks was understood primarily in terms of their dislocation from, and opposition to, 'real' places and social relations. It is precisely this sense of separation between 'virtual' and 'real' that has been increasingly undermined by the development of the pervasive networks of embedded and mobile media that now dominate urban experience. Using large video screens as the interface for live events taking place simultaneously in different cities offers a strategic avenue for exploring the new contours of the experience of 'being together' in networked cities.

In August 2009 we participated in an event linking large video screens in Melbourne's Federation Square and Tomorrow City in Incheon, Korea. The event involved a combination of live camera crosses, screenings of artists' videos, and live performance in each site. It also involved two interactive art works specifically commissioned for the research, both using text messaging as the interface enabling audiences present at the event to generate content displayed simultaneously on the screens in each city. *SMS origins* (created by Australian artists Leon Cmielewski and Josephine Starrs in conjunction with programmer Adam Hinshaw) invited participants to send a text message with the details of the places of birth of their parents and themselves. On receiving the message, software translates the information into lines connecting the different places on a world map displayed on the two screens. Audiences in both sites could see the creation of a real time map tracing coordinates that reflect the collective input of all participants. The graphic design of the work is deliberately simple, emphasising the process of audience input rather than offering a rich palette for personal expression. Like other crowd-sourced participatory art, the content of the work will be different each time it is displayed, depending on the composition of the audience.

The second interactive work, *Value@ Tomorrow City* (created by Korean artist Seung Joon Choi) used the screen more as a public bulletin board. Audiences were asked to respond to the question: 'As a member of the future city, what do you think is the most important value?' When messages were sent, the different 'values' appeared on the screen as key words. If the words entered by one person were identical or similar to those used by others, the size and position of display changed. By using the screens as the means to display a live 'folksonomy' (an informal taxonomy generated by users), users were able to conjugate a novel form of dialogue between the inhabitants of different cities.

These two works were designed as prototypes to explore the still largely untapped potential for utilising the infrastructure of public screen for different ends from advertising display, or coverage of major live events such as professional sport. As Crang and Graham note, 'the environment has always been recursively influenced by action. What these technologies do is change the temporality of that action.'[15] Real time interactivity can be manifested in many different ways. An important aspect of the design of these text-message based artworks was their capacity to display data in a manner which did not 'average' it, but retained traces of individual inputs while displaying each contribution as part of a dynamic network.[16]

Capacity to register, process and display in real time data gathered from a multiplicity of sources is a direct outgrowth of access to low cost, pervasive digital networks. Our initial research indicated that audience members not only gained pleasure from participation, but also developed a sense of 'connection' to those in the other city. The pleasure might be partly because the capacity to 'make a mark' in central city public spaces is relatively rare, especially for young people. Using the large screen in this way enhances a sense of belonging in the space, and also a sense of engagement with others who are watching or performing the same activity. This finding resonates with what other operators of large video screens situated in public space, such as CASZ and the BBC, have learned about the importance of local relevance to the programming of public screens.[17] The sense of 'connection'

generated between participants in different cities remains both harder to define and more important to explore. It points to the new contours of experience, an emergent psycho-geography in which relations of immediacy and mediation are increasingly intertwined, and in which infrastructure such as large screens situated in public spaces might support new forms of citizen-to-citizen dialogue in public spaces which are both locally embedded and transnationally extended.

VI

Francois Truffaut's wonderful film adaptation of Ray Bradbury's novel *Fahrenheit 451* offers a powerful satire of the claims of an earlier era of participatory media. In one scene, Montag (the fireman charged with burning books) watches with disdain as his wife Linda takes part in a wall-screen 'tele-play' with a part written 'just for her'. In fact the role involves Linda responding on cue and according to script, no doubt in concert with an audience of equally sedated peers. Truffaut's target was the pseudo-inclusive format of television with its fiction of direct and intimate address to each viewer — what Eco once called 'neo-television'.[18] Truffaut's point is not only that such forms of address mask a one-way communicative flow, but also that the highly scripted roles leave even the presenters with very little room for manoeuvre. It is tempting to believe that the different architecture of the internet changes everything, but the situation is clearly more complex. The integration of 'audience participation' into contemporary television, as text messages and audience voting systems merge ratings strategies with revenue genera-tion, demonstrates that we have not yet moved as far from Truffaut's scenario of pseudo-participation as we might think. In Stiegler's formulation, the digital is the threshold of hyper-industrialisation in which production and consumption are directly articulated with credit systems

> With the advent of very advanced control technologies emerging from digitalisation, and converging in a *computational* system of globally integrated production and consumption, new cultural, editing and programming industries then appeared. What is new is that they are

technologically linked by universal digital equivalence (the binary system) to telecommunications systems and to computers, and, through this, directly articulated with logistical and production systems (barcodes and credit cards enabling the tracing of products and consumers), all of which constitutes the hyper-industrial epoch strictly speaking, dominated by the categorisation of hyper-segmented 'targets' ("surgically" precise marketing organising consumption) and by functioning in real time (production), through lean production [*flux tendus*] and *just in time* (logistics).[19]

Eco himself offered a more optimistic sense of the participatory possibilities of art in his seminal 'Open Work' essay, written in 1962.[20] While Eco always acknowledges the ability for all artworks to contain multiple meanings and to thereby be interpreted differently by different readers/viewers—this was the thrust of his whole semiotic project—the essay identifies the emergence of what he calls 'works in motion'. Eco was referring to key modernist *avant-garde* works by artists such as Stockhausen and Brecht, in which elements were deliberately left open, either to audience input or to chance. But we can transpose Eco's concept to the present, and recognise qualities of the digital art works described above: *essentially unfinished* works, built around the capacity for rapidly assembling multiple inputs from various sources. The widespread availability of digital tools and the extensive networked infrastructure of contemporary cities has not only created the conditions for hyper-industrialisation, but has generated new possibilities for creating 'open works' in public space, works which vary in each different iteration, depending on the composition of users. Such works suggest models for the way digital infrastructure might be deployed as platforms for public participation.

The divergence between Stiegler's and Eco's scenarios indicates the ambivalence surrounding the issue of participatory public space that I posed at the opening of this chapter. Numerous questions remain unresolved around how digital art might be deployed as platforms for public participation capable of fostering the social skills of cooperation and

communication that are vital to complex societies. If we follow Lazzarato[21] and accept that widespread participation is an important aim for contemporary art, how do we ensure this is not equated with the dictatorship of 'easy' forms of reception: the normalisation of the idea that art should be quickly intelligible and easily *digested* by everyone? And how do we avoid the goal that encouraging participation might carry with it an unspoken aim of imposing a false image of social unity? As Lefebvre's concept of the right to the city attests, democracy is a process of contestation as much as consensus, and the critical role of public space as an arena for staging dissensus should not be foreclosed. If contestation should not be reduced to competition, or regulation by the invisible hand of the market, opposing this trajectory cannot be simply a matter of advocating an abstract and principled solidarity. What is significant about the works I have described here is not only their concern with the specific materiality and inscription of living bodies as elements of complex socio-technical networks but also their concern for how bodies enter into public relations. Public space in the twenty-first-century networked city has become a vital medium for exploring civility in a supernational context, and for enacting experiences and developing skills that have become integral to the challenge to extend forms of cooperation beyond the historical bounds that have hitherto defined the social.

Notes

1 N. Papastergiadis and H. Rogers,'The Parafunctional' in *The Dream of Urbanity*, ed. J. Stathatos (London: Academy Group, 1996), 76-86.

2 H. Lefebvre, 'The right to the city', in *Writings on Cities: Henri Lefebvre*, eds E. Kofman and E. Lebas (Blackwell, Oxford and Cambridge, Mass., 1996 (originally published as *Le Droit à la ville*, 1968)).

3 D. Harvey, 'The right to the city', *New Left Review* 53 (2008): 23-40.

4 M. Lazzarato, *The Misfortunes of the 'Artistic Critique' and of Cultural Employment*, 2007: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0207/lazzarato/en>.

5 R. Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man: On the Social Psychology of Capitalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978)

6 R. Sennett, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012).

7 Ibid., 6.

8 Y. Benkler, *The Wealth of Networks* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2006), 3.

9 M. Bauwens, 'The Political economy of peer production', 2005 <www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=499>.

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10   See <http://www.vectorialvancouver.net/home.html>.
11   R. Lozano-Hemmer, email to the author, 2006.
12   Ibid.
13   See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyI78ZF0--Y>.
14   'Large screens and the transnational public sphere' (2009-2013) is a Linkage
     Project funded by the Australian Research Council with partners Federation
     Square , Australia Council for the Arts and Art Centre Nab (Seoul).
15   M. Crang and S. Graham, 'Sentient cities', *Information, Communication and
     Society* 10, no. 6 (2007): 789-817, 811.
16   In *SMS_Origins*, when each mapping first appears, it is identified by the three
     place names and the line linking them is traced in bold. As the next mapping
     proceeds, the first line becomes part of the network. In *Value@Tomorrow City*,
     each term is tagged with the last digits of the sender's phone number.
17   S. McQuire, M. Martin and S. Niederer eds, *Urban Screens Reader* (Amsterdam:
     Institute of Network Cultures, 2009).
18   U. Eco, 'A guide to neo-television', *Framework* 25 (1984).
19   B. Steigler, *The Decadence of Industrial Democracies*, trans. D. Ross and S. Arnold
     (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), 5.
20   U. Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. A. Cancogni (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard
     University Press,1989).
21   Lazzarato.

'All Your Chocolate Rain are Belonging to Us?':
Viral Video, YouTube and the Dynamics of Participatory Culture

Jean Burgess

Marketers and media producers for the past several years have
been racing to capture the marketing potential of both online
social networks and user-created content. 'Viral marketing',
for example, is the attempt to exploit the network effects
of word-of-mouth and internet communication to induce a
massive number of users to pass on 'marketing messages and
brand information voluntarily'.[1] The related term 'viral video'
has emerged to describe the phenomenon in which video clips
become highly popular through rapid, user-led distribution
via the internet. How, or whether, the 'bottom-up' dynamics of
viral video can be mobilised for instrumental purposes—from
marketing to political advertising—remains an open question.
But 'viral video' could be much more than a banal marketing
buzzword—in fact, interrogating it a bit more closely in the
specific context of YouTube can help us cut through the hype
and better understand some of the more complex characteris-
tics of participatory popular culture online.

    In popular usage, the term 'viral' (and the related internet
'meme') are of course very loosely applied biological metaphors,
appropriated from various attempts to develop a science of
cultural transmission based on evolutionary theory that have
been unfolding for decades. The contested field of 'memetics'
is the best-known, but by no means only, strand of this kind of

thinking, which began with Richard Dawkins' proposal in *The Selfish Gene* of the 'meme' as the corresponding cultural unit to the biological gene.[2] Similar to the scientific usage in meaning if not analytical precision, in contemporary popular usage an internet 'meme' is a faddish joke or practice (like a humorous way of captioning cat pictures) that becomes widely imitated. In this popular understanding, internet 'memes' do appear to spread and replicate 'virally'—that is, they appear to spread and mutate via distributed networks in ways that the original producers cannot determine and control.

But, in a step backward from the more participatory idea of the internet 'meme', very often the term 'viral video' is used to refer simply to those videos which are viewed by a large number of people, generally as a result of knowledge about the video being spread rapidly through the internet population via word-of-mouth. For example, Dan Ackerman Greenberg runs an 'astroturfing' company, employing covert strategies to turn apparently authentic (but actually commercial) videos 'viral'. In his now-notorious post on the technology business weblog Techrunch, Greenberg defines viral videos as 'videos that have travelled all around the internet and been posted on YouTube, MySpace, Google Video, Facebook, Digg, blogs, etc.—videos with millions and millions of views'.[3] This focus on networked distribution resulting in 'millions and millions of views', while it makes sense to advertisers, is an oversimplification of the dynamics of online popular culture. In this chapter I propose an alternative view, one that emphasises the central role of cultural *participation* in the creation of cultural, social and economic value in participatory culture.

Viewed from the perspective of cultural participation rather than marketing, videos are not 'messages', and neither are they 'products' that are distributed via social networks. Rather, they are the mediating mechanisms through which cultural *practices* are originated, adopted and (sometimes) retained *within* social networks. Indeed, scholars at the forefront of YouTube research argue that for those partici-pants who actively contribute content and engage in cultural conversation around online video, YouTube is in itself a social network site; one in which videos (rather than 'friend-ing') are the primary medium of social connection between

participants.[4] In considering what these new social dynamics of engagement with media might mean for thinking about cultural production and consumption, Henry Jenkins argues that value is primarily generated via 'spreadability'. Through reuse, reworking and redistribution, spreadable media content 'gains greater resonance in the culture, taking on new meanings, finding new audiences, attracting new markets, and generating new values.'[5] By this logic any particular video produces cultural value to the extent that it acts as a hub for further creative activity by a wide range of participants in this social network—that is, the extent to which it contributes to what Jonathan Zittrain might call YouTube's 'generative qualities'.[6]

There are of course very many videos on YouTube—in April 2008 there were over eighty million of them, and there will be millions more by the time this is published.[7] They vary widely in the extent and qualities of their popularity, the media ecologies in which they originate and circulate, and the uses made of them by audiences. But it is the relatively small number of highly popular videos—those that sit at the 'fat head' of the 'long tail'—that are most useful in an attempt to rethink the dynamics of 'viral' video. Some of these videos do become extremely popular as one-offs, via word-of-mouth combined with media hype, on the basis of their novelty. Ostensibly user-created videos like Judson Laipply's 'Evolution of Dance' (viewed 85 million times as at May 2008) and Chris Crocker's 'Leave Britney Alone!' (viewed 20 million times), both picked up by the mainstream media only after they had achieved high levels of popularity on the web, are good examples. There are also many highly popular YouTube videos that were originally contributed by 'traditional media' companies like television networks and major music labels (especially Top 40 music videos—indeed, many of the most viewed and 'most favourited' videos of all time are official music videos).[8] For my purposes, the more interesting examples of 'viral video', while being quantitatively popular in this way, also attract active, participatory and creative engagement from other participants. Among YouTube's 'greatest hits' are several good examples of how this works.

Burgess and Green's content survey of YouTube drew

on a sample of 4,300 highly popular videos to compare user-created and traditional media content across four measures of popularity.[9] From this data it is possible to distil a list of 'super popular top ten' videos with all-time views in the millions (even the tens of millions), and comments and video responses in the thousands.[10] For the remainder of this chapter I concentrate on two of these highly popular videos, both of which illustrate the idea of viral video as participation in social networks particularly well. The first is the music video 'Chocolate Rain'. The second—another music video—is simply entitled 'Guitar'.[11]

The first thing to note is that neither of these videos are what we might understand to be 'traditional' media content—they were both coded in the study as 'user-created content' and they each draw on particular forms of vernacular creativity.[12] Notably, like many of the most popular YouTube videos of all time both are performance-based and music-related, rather than narrative or information-based.[13] But it isn't evident on the basis of a textual reading why—or, more importantly, in what ways—these videos were so popular during the period in which the study was conducted. It is only by looking at the creative activity that occurred *around* these videos that we can begin to understand just how important participation is to popularity.

Amateur singer-songwriter Tay Zonday's music video 'Chocolate Rain' had received more than twenty million views by April 2008.[14] The video featured an apparently earnest Zonday (a University of Minnesota graduate student whose real name is Adam Bahner) singing his self-penned pop song into a vocal microphone against the backdrop of what appears to be a white sheet, with occasional cuts away to his hands on the keyboard. The video shows Zonday moving strangely to one side between lines—the on-screen titles explain: 'I move away from the mic to breathe in.'

The song has an extremely simple and repetitive melody and keyboard riff, drawing even more attention to Zonday's idiosyncratic vocal delivery; the low pitch of his voice, which has been compared to Paul Robeson and Barry White, is at odds with his boyish looks. The equally repetitive lyrics deal with themes of racial prejudice:

Chocolate Rain
Raised your neighborhood insurance rates
Chocolate Rain
Makes us happy livin' in a gate
Chocolate Rain
Made me cross the street the other day
Chocolate Rain
Made you turn your head the other way
[Chorus]
Chocolate Rain
History quickly crashing through your veins
Chocolate Rain
Using you to fall back down again [Repeat]

It is arguably the combination of oddness and earnest amateurism that made 'Chocolate Rain' such a massive YouTube hit. According to Zonday himself, the initial spike of attention for the video (which occurred several months after it was first uploaded) originated 'as a joke at 4chan.org', a very popular image board and a significant source of internet 'memes'.[15] It seems that 4chan members swarmed YouTube to push 'Chocolate Rain' up the rankings initially motivated by the specific ethics of this internet subculture, oriented around absurdist and sometimes cruel frat-house humour. Calling to mind the Anonymous mantra 'REPRODUCE. REPRODUCE. REPRODUCE', it is easy to see how the 'viral' metaphor might apply to this piece of mischief making.[16] And perhaps the joke was on the mischief-makers in the end, because all this activity created a celebrity out of Zonday. At the height of 'Chocolate Rain's popularity in the northern summer of 2007, he appeared on a number of talk shows and was interviewed by the press, and eventually a self-parodying version of the song was produced for a faux-MTV film clip, which was used as part of a promotional campaign for Cherry Chocolate Diet Dr Pepper.[17]

But the *uses* of 'Chocolate Rain' as part of participatory culture ended up far exceeding the intentions of either the original producer or the original disseminators. There was a relatively brief but highly creative flurry of parodies, mash-ups and remixes as 'Chocolate Rain's popularity spiked. These derivative works reference 'Chocolate Rain' by imitating or

reusing parts of it and frequently combining them with many ideas from other sources, building on layers of knowledge built up in previous internet 'phenomena' as well as broadcast media fandom (like *Star Wars*).

One of the most popular parodies was a performance of the song by the lead character from the web sitcom 'Chad Vader, Dayshift Manager' (Darth Vader's 'less- talented, less-charismatic younger brother' and grocery store manager), which relies on YouTube for much of its audience.[18] In a direct parody of the video, 'Chad Vader' uses the same *mise-en-scene*, melody and piano riff, and repeats the 'I move away from the microphone to breathe in' on-screen text, but substitutes lyrics that reference his own show, and audibly breathes through his Darth Vader mask in between lines, creating an additional layer of humour out of the 'breathing' joke.[19] Another parody entitled 'Vanilla Snow' also emulates the visual and aural elements of the video (the sheet as backdrop, the overly contrastive lighting and yellow tones, the performer's pose in front of the microphone wearing headphones, the strangely deep voice and the backing track) but parodies the race politics of the song by substituting new lyrics that play on the metaphorical equation of 'chocolate' with racial blackness, riffing off 'vanilla' (whiteness) instead.[20] Many of the YouTube spoofs and remixes are firmly embedded in online geek culture — examples include the '8bit remix', and especially the mash-up of the song's melody with the 'lyrics' from the 'All Your Base Are Belong To Us' meme, giving us the meme-upon-meme: 'All Your Chocolate Rain Are Belong To Us'.[21]

As this example shows, there is much more going on in viral video than 'information' about a video being communicated throughout a population. Successful 'viral' videos have textual hooks or key signifiers, which cannot be identified in advance (even, or especially, by their authors) but only after the fact, when they have become prominent via being selected a number of times for repetition. After becoming recognisable through this process of repetition, these key signifiers are then available for plugging into other forms, texts and inter-texts — they become part of the available cultural repertoire of vernacular video. Because they produce new possibilities, even apparently pointless, nihilistic and playful forms of

creativity are contributions to knowledge. This is true even if (as in the case of the 'Chocolate Rain' example) they work mostly to make a joke out of someone.

The video 'Guitar' is a more ordinary example, but one with far greater reach and staying power than the 'Chocolate Rain' phenomenon. 'Guitar' is a technically demanding neoclassical metal cover of Pachelbel's *Canon in D*, performed on electric guitar, in a bedroom. The performer in the video—seated on his bed, backlit by the sunlight streaming in from the window, his face obscured by a baseball cap—is a South Korean guitarist named Jeong-Hyun Lim.[22] With over forty million views to date, his video is among the most popular YouTube videos of all time, and continues to attract new viewers, comments, and video responses.

But this video is not in any way original. Iteration and incremental innovation are historically fundamental to the evolution of musical technique and style, and the canon as musical form (in which layers of repetition are laid one above the other to create counterpoint) fundamentally invites imitation. Imitation is certainly the order of the day in this case: the piece that 'funtwo' (Lim) is performing, *Canon Rock*, is in turn a 'cover' of one of the most popular pieces of classical music ever written, and arranged for electric guitar and backing track by the Taiwanese musician and composer Jerry Chang (JerryC). The 'Canon Rock' arrangement became popular on the internet after a video of JerryC playing the piece was posted online. The backing track and guitar tabs were also made available, making it easy for other musicians to attempt to execute the arrangement, and to record their attempts as performances. The funtwo 'Guitar' video is one of these covers of Chang's arrangement, apparently originally uploaded to the Korean musician's website http://mule.co.kr. It was later uploaded to YouTube by a fan of Lim's, who posted it under the name 'funtwo'.[23] Once it became popular on YouTube, the cycle of imitation, adaptation and innovation continued, and so on it went, *ad infinitum*.

Most of the response videos are either direct emulations (in which other bedroom guitarists test and prove their skills) or variations on the genre that the original 'Guitar' video distilled if not originated. In addition to the approximately

one hundred direct video responses to the 'Guitar' video, a keyword search for 'canon rock' in YouTube returns more than thirteen thousand videos, most of which appear to be versions of the original 'Canon Rock' track, performed not only on guitars but also on pianos, violins and even a toy keyboard.[24] These video responses frequently emulate the original *mise-en-scene*—with the performer seated on a bed, backlit by light from a window, and looking down rather than at the camera. But there are a number of user-led innovations as well, most notably a proliferation of other arrangements of the original *Canon* by Pachelbel, performed on a staggering array of instruments, often using extended techniques and technologies like delay pedals. There is even a version of JerryC's original 'Canon Rock' available for the 'Frets on Fire' game (a free, open source clone of the popular title 'Guitar Hero', with a built in song importer/editor), enabling non-guitarists to emulate the virtuosity of the bedroom guitarists.

Perhaps the most interesting example is the montage video 'Ultimate Canon Rock', a remix of forty versions of the rock guitar arrangement, all performed by bedroom guitarists, and painstakingly edited together by YouTuber 'impeto' to make a complete new version of the performance.[25] This video has received views in excess of three million, so that its popularity is beginning to approach that of the 'original' funtwo version. In itself, 'Ultimate Canon Rock' is an act of iterative vernacular creativity that has emerged out of the conversational dynamics of YouTube as a social network as much as out of any desire for self-expression. The video captures the ways in which small contributions from a large number of participants collectively add up to much more than the sum of their parts; the value of the video as an element in participatory culture cannot be attributed back to an original producer (because, for one thing, there isn't one).

The video is also a particularly good example of an existing performance genre, and one that is arguably paradigmatic of user-created content on YouTube—the virtuosic bedroom musical performance, straight to camera, vlog-style. The everydayness of the genre is all the more evident because it's situated *in* the bedroom—it draws on the long traditions of vernacular creativity articulated to 'privatised' media

use. Productive play, media consumption and cultural performance have always been part of the repertoire of these privatised spaces of cultural participation, but increasingly they have become *publicised* via webcams, SNS profiles and YouTube itself.[26]

The personal musical performance as a YouTube genre operates as a site of both play and learning. It involves showing off—the showcasing of skill and the setting of standards for other players in the game to attain or beat; and it also operates as a site of peer learning and teaching—many of the descriptions and comments on covers of 'Canon Rock' ask for or offer critiques, tips and tricks, but in a generally supportive and often humorous manner. The bedroom music genre demonstrates how relatively simple uses of video technology (recording straight to camera and uploading without much editing) and highly constrained genres (the musical cover), while not necessarily contributing to the aesthetic 'advancement' of the medium, can invite further participation by establishing clear rules. The longevity of the video's popularity, I would argue, is a function of the extent to which the culture surrounding the neoclassical cover music video invites participation and rewards repetition and ongoing engagement.

In contrast, internet 'meme'-based viral videos rely on inside jokes that are spoiled by going mainstream, and therefore quickly reach a tipping point and tend to have relatively short shelf lives. A good example is the 'Rickrolling' phenomenon. Rickrolling—posting a misleading link that leads to Rick Astley's 1988 hit music video 'Never Gonna Give You Up', 'forcing' the unsuspecting viewer to sit through yet another viewing of the irritating one-hit wonder—gained particular prominence online and in the popular press throughout 2008. And it was widely reported by those in the know that once the Rickrolling meme had made the pages of the mainstream press, it was over.[27]

'Chocolate Rain' and 'Guitar' operate according to different temporal logics—or 'frequencies of public writing'—and they are structured by contrasting ethics of participation.[28] But both examples show that in order to endow the metaphors implied by terms like 'memes', 'viruses' and 'spreadability' with any explanatory power, it is necessary to see videos as

mediators of ideas that are taken up in practice within social networks, not as discrete texts that are produced in one place and then are later consumed somewhere else by isolated individuals or unwitting masses. These ideas are propagated by being taken up and used in new works, in new ways, and therefore are transformed on each iteration—a 'copy the instructions', rather than 'copy the product' model of replication and variation, and this process takes place within and with reference to particular social networks or subcultures. Further, and contra much of the hype about 'new media', many of the performative and communicative practices that spread via viral video 'crazes' are not at all new, but are deeply situated in everyday, even mundane, creative traditions.

Without stretching an overstretched metaphor too far, then, the dynamics of viral video could be understood as involving the spread of replicable ideas (expressed in performances and practices), via the processes of vernacular creativity, among communities connected through social networks. Rethinking 'viral video' in this way may contribute to a better understanding of how the cultures emerging around user-created video—imitative, playful and often ordinary—are shaping the dynamics of contemporary popular culture.

Notes

1   See, for example A. Dobele, D. Toleman and M. Beverland, 'Controlled infection! Spreading the brand message through viral marketing', *Business Horizons* 48, no. 2 (2005).

2   R. Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976); and developed more fully by others, see for example S. Blackmore, *The Meme Machine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

3   D. Ackerman Greenberg, 'The secret strategies behind many viral videos', *Techcrunch* (November 2007): <http://www.techcrunch.com/2007/11/22/the-secret-strategies-behind-many-viral- videos/>.

4   See especially P. G. Lange, 'Publicly private and privately public: Social networking on YouTube', *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 13, no. 1 (2007): <http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol13/issue1/lange.html>; and John C. Paolillo, 'Structure and network in the YouTube core', *41st Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences,* 2008.

5   H. Jenkins, '"Slash me, mash me, spread me…", Confessions of an Aca/Fan' (24 April 2007): <http://www.henryjenkins.org/2007/04/slash_me_mash_me_but_please_sp.html>.

6   J. Zittrain, *The Future of the Internet—And How to Stop It* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2008).

7   On 9 April 2008, a wildcard search returned 83.4 million videos.

8   The most favourited YouTube videos are listed at <http://youtube.com/browse?s=mf>.
9   This study was supported by the Convergence Culture Consortium and the Comparative Media Studies Program at MIT, and by the Centre of Excellence for Creative Industries and Innovation at Queensland University of Technology. See J. Burgess and J. Green, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).
10   Popularity was measured by the total number of views the videos had received at the time of data capture.
11   'Guitar' was the video with the most views overall in the entire sample for the period, and it appeared in the 'most discussed' and 'most responded' lists, not only the 'most viewed' list.
12   Videos that appeared to have been produced outside of the media industries and related professions.
13   A quick scan of the most viewed videos of all time at <http://youtube.com/browse?s=mp&t=a&c=0&l=&b=0> confirms this; the page is dominated by music videos.
14   See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EwTZ2xpQwpA>.
15   'Chocolate Rain', *Wikipedia*: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chocolate_Rain>.
16   See <http://www.wikichan.org/index.php/Anonymous>.
17   See 'Cherry Chocolate Rain' <http://youtube.com/watch?v=2x2W12A8Qow>.
18   Chad Vader, which focuses on *Star Wars* parody and other geek humour, is a creation of Blame Society Productions (Aaron Yonda and Matt Sloan). See <http://www.blamesociety.net/>.
19   See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P6dUCOS1bM0>.
20   See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nTQOpibv_OA>.
21   See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=caIBKOztlA0>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dUyxurUWtSQ>.
22   After several impostors came forward claiming to be funtwo, Lim was revealed as the real 'performer in the "Guitar" video' in a *New York Times* article. Virginia Heffernand, 'Web guitar wizard revealed at last', *New York Times,* 27 August 2006, see <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/08/27/arts/television/27heff.htm>.
23   See Lim's *Wikipedia* entry: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeong-Hyun_Lim>.
24   See <http://youtube.com/watch?v=6Xvd_62Oec8>.
25   See <http://youtube-impeto.blogspot.com/>.
26   S. L. Baker, 'Pop in(to) the bedroom: Popular music in pre-teen girls' bedroom culture', *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 7, no. 1 (2004): 75-93.
27   See 'The biggest little internet hoax on wheels hits mainstream', *Fox News*, 22 April 2008 <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,352010,00.html>.
28   J. Hartley, *Television Truths* (London: Blackwell, 2008), 30-6.

What is the Social in Social Media?

Geert Lovink

Headlines: 'Next time you're hiring, forget personality tests, just check out the applicant's Facebook profile instead'; 'Stephanie Watanabe spent nearly four hours Thursday night unfriending about 700 of her Facebook friends — and she isn't done yet'; 'Facebook apology or jail time: Ohio man gets to choose'; 'Study: Facebook users getting less friendly'; 'Women tend to have stronger feelings regarding who has access to their personal information' (Mary Madden); 'All dressed up and no place to go' (WSJ); 'I'm making more of an effort to be social these days, because I don't want to be alone, and I want to meet people' (Cindy Sherman); '30 percent posted updates that met the American Psychiatric Association's criteria for a symptom of depression, reporting feelings of worthlessness or hopelessness, insomnia or sleeping too much, and difficulty concentrating'; 'Control your patients: "Do you hire someone in the clinic to look at Facebook all day?" Dr. Moreno asked. "That's not practical and borders on creepy."'; 'Hunt for Berlin police officer pictured giving Nazi salute on Facebook'; '15-year-old takes to Facebook to curse and complain about her parents. The disgusted father later blasts her laptop with a gun.'

The use of the word 'social' in the context of information technology dates back to the very beginnings of cybernetics. It later pops up again in the 1980s' context of 'groupware'. The materialist school of German media theorist Friedrich Kittler has dismissed the use of the word of 'social' as irrelevant fluff (what computers do is calculate, they do not interfere in human relations, stop projecting our mundane all-too-human desires onto electronic circuits and so on). Holistic

hippies of the *Wired* school on the other hand have ignored this cynical machine knowledge from Old Europe with a positive, humanistic view that emphasises computers as tools for personal liberation and it was Steve Jobs at Apple who turned this mentality into a design and marketing machine. Computers are not made for engineers. From the beginning the 'Californian' individualistic emphasis on cool interface design and usability has been matched with an interest in the community aspect of computer networking. Before the 'dotcom' venture capital takeover of the field in the second half of the 1990s, progressive computing was primarily seen as a tool for collaboration between two or more people.

In his unpublished essay 'How computer networks became social', Sydney media theorist Chris Chesher maps out the historical development from sociometry and social network analysis (with roots are going back to the 1930s), an 'offline' science that studies the dynamics of human networks to Granowetter's theory of the strengths of weak links in 1973, Castells' *Network Society* (1996) and the current mapping efforts of the techno-scientists that gather under the Actor Network Theory (ANT) umbrella.[1] The conceptual leap that is relevant here is the move from groups, lists, forums and communities to emphasise empowering loosely connected individuals in networks, a shift that happened throughout the neoliberal 1990s, facilitated by growing computing power, growth in storage capacity and internet bandwidth and easier interfaces on smaller and smaller (mobile) devices. This is where we enter the Empire of the Social. It also needs to be said that 'the social' could only become technical, and become so successful, after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 when state communism no longer posed a (military) threat to free-market capitalism. Computers have always been hybrids of the social and the post-human. From the very being of their industrial life as giant calculators the linking up of different units was seen as a possibility and necessity. As early as 1953, two computers in different locations were able to 'talk' to each other via modems.

If we want to discover an answer to the question 'what does "social" in today's "social media" mean?', a possible starting point could be the notion of the disappearance of the

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social as described by Jean Baudrillard, the French sociologist who theorised the changing role of the subject as consumer. According to Baudrillard at some point the social lost its historical role and imploded into the media. If the social is no longer the once dangerous mix of politicised proletarians, frustrated unemployed and dirty clochards that hang out on the streets, waiting for the next opportunity to revolt under whatever banner, then how do social elements manifest themselves in the digital networked age?

The 'social question' may not have been resolved but at least for decades it felt as if it was neutralised. In the Western post-World War II period, the instrumental knowledge of how to manage the social was seen as a necessity and this reduced the intellectual range to a somewhat closed circle of professional experts that dealt with 'the social'. Now, in the midst of a global economic downturn can we see a renaissance of the social? Is all this talk about the rise of 'social media' just a linguistic coincidence? Can we speak, in the never-ending aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, of a 'return of the social'? Is there a growing class awareness and, if so, can this spread into the electronic realm? Despite the hardships of un-employment, growing income disparities and Occupy protests, the prospects of a global networked uprising seems unlikely. Protests are successful precisely because they are local, despite their network presence. While 'memes' are travelling at the speed of light and capable of spreading basic concepts, the question remains: How could the separate entities of work, culture, politics and networked communication in a global context be connected in such a way that information (for instance via Twitter) and interpersonal communication (email, Facebook) turn into global events?

We can put such considerations into a larger, strategic context. Do all these neatly administrated contacts and address books at some point spill over and leave the virtual realm, as the popularity of dating sites seems to suggest? Do we only share information, experiences and emotions, or do we also conspire, as 'social swarms', to raid reality in order to create so-called real world events? Will contacts mutate into comrades? It seems that social media solve the organisational problems that the baby boom/suburb generation faced fifty

years ago: boredom, isolation, depression and desire. How do we come together, right now? Do we unconsciously fear (or long for) the day when our vital infrastructure breaks down and we really need each other? Or should we read the Simulacrum of the Social as an organised agony over the loss of community after the defragmentation of family, marriage, friendship? Why do we assemble these ever growing collections of contacts? Is the Other, relabelled as 'friend', nothing more than a future customer, lifesaver aka business partner? What new forms of social imaginary exist? At what point does the administration of others mutate into something different altogether? Will befriending disappear overnight, like so many new media-related practices that vanished in the digital nirvana?

The container concept 'social media', describing a fuzzy collection of websites from Facebook, Digg, YouTube and Twitter to Wikipedia, is not a nostalgic project aiming to revive the once dangerous potential of 'the social' as angry mob that demands the end of economic inequality. Instead, to remain inside Baudrillard's vocabulary, the social is reanimated as a simulacrum of its own ability to create meaningful and lasting social relations. Roaming around in virtual global networks, we believe we are less and less committed to our roles within traditional communities such as the family, church and neighbourhood. Historical subjects, once defined in terms like citizens or members of a class, carrying certain rights, have been transformed into subjects with agency, dynamic actors called users, customers who complain and prosumers. The social is no longer a reference to society—an insight that troubles us theorists and critics who stick to empirical research which proves that people, despite all their outward behaviour, remain firmly embedded in their traditional, local structures.

The social no longer manifests itself primarily as a class, movement or mob. Neither does it institutionalise itself anymore as happened during the postwar decades of the welfare state. And even the postmodern phase of disintegration and decay seems over. Nowadays the social manifests itself as a network. The networked practices emerge outside the walls of twentieth-century institutions, leading to a

'corrosion of conformity'. The network is the actual shape of the social. What counts, for instance in politics and business, are the 'social facts' as they present themselves through network analysis and its corresponding data visualisations. The institutional part of life is another matter, a realm that quickly falls behind, becoming a parallel universe. It is tempting to remain positive and portray a synthesis, further down the road, between the formalised power structures inside institutions and the growing influence of the informal networks but there's little evidence of this Third Way approach. The PR-driven belief system that social media will, one day, be integrated is nothing more than New Age optimism. The social, once wonder glue to repair historical damages, can quickly turn into explosive material. A total ban is nearly impossible, even in authoritarian countries. Ignoring social media as background noise also backfires. This is why institutions, from hospitals to universities, hire swarms of temporary consultants to manage social media for them.

Social media fulfil the promise of communication as an exchange instead of forbidding responses that demand replies. Similar to an early writing of Baudrillard's, social media can be understood as 'reciprocal spaces of speech and response' that lure users to say something, anything.[2] Later on Baudrillard changed his position and no longer believed in the emancipatory aspect of talking back to the media. Restoring the symbolic exchange wasn't enough — and this feature is precisely what social media offer their users as a liberation gesture. What counted for Baudrillard was the superior position of the silent majority.

In their 2012 pamphlet *Declaration* Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri avoid discussing the larger social dimensions of community, cohesion and society. What they witness is unconscious slavery: 'people sometimes strive for their servitude as if it were their salvation.' It is primarily individual entitlement that interests these theorists in social media, not the social at large. 'Is it possible that in their voluntary communication and expression, in their blogging and social media practices, people are contributing to instead of contesting repressive forces?' For us, the mediatised, work and leisure can no longer be separated. But why don't they express

interest for the equally obvious observation of productive side of being connected to others?

Hardt and Negri mistakenly reduce social networking to a media question as if internet and smart phones are only used to look up and produce information. Concerning the role of communication they conclude, 'nothing can beat the being together of bodies and the corporeal communication that is the basis of collective political intelligence and action'.[3] Social links are probably nothing but fluff, a veritable world of sweet sassiness. In this way the true nature of social life online remains out of sight, and thus unscrutinised. Social meets media doesn't have to be sold as some Hegelian synthesis, a direction in which world history necessarily evolves. However, the strong yet abstract concentration of social activity that is already out there is something that needs to be theorised. As such, there is the need for further elucidation of Hardt and Negri's call to refuse mediation: 'We need to make new truths, which can be created by singularities in networks communicating and being there.' We need both networking and encampment. In their version of the social 'we swarm like insects' and act as 'a decentralised multitude of singularities that communicates horizontally'. [4] But the power structures, and frictions, that emerge from this constellation are yet to be addressed.

The search for the social online will not be found if the project stays with the remains of nineteenth-century European social theory. This is what makes the 'precarious labour' debate about Marx and exploitation inside Facebook so tricky.[5] What we need to do instead is take the process of socialisation at face value and refrain from well meaning political intentions (for instance to speculate on the possibility of 'Facebook revolutions' in relation to the 2011 Arab Spring and the movements of the squares). The workings of social media are subtle, informal and indirect. How can we understand the social turn in new media, beyond good and evil, as something that is both cold and intimate as Eva Illouz described it in her book *Cold Intimacies*?[6] Literature from the media industry and IT tends to shy away from the question posed here. Virtues such as accessibility and usability do not explain what people are looking for 'out there'. There are similar limits to the (professional)

discourse of trust which also tries to bridge the informal with the legal sphere of rules and regulations.

The 'obliteration of the social' has not led to a disappearance of sociology but indeed downgraded the importance of social theory within critical debates. A 'web sociology' that has freed itself of the real–virtual dichotomies, not limiting its research scope to 'social implications of technology' (such as for example internet addiction) could play a critical role in getting a better understanding of how 'class analysis' and mediatisation are intertwined. As Israeli sociologist Eva Illouz wrote to me in response to this question:

> If sociology has traditionally called on us to exert our shrewdness and vigilance in the art of making distinctions (between use value and exchange value; life world and colonisation of the life world, etc.), the challenge that awaits us is to exercise the same vigilance in a social world which consistently defeats these distinctions.[7]

The Amsterdam pioneer of web sociology and editor of *SocioSite*, Albert Benschop, proposes to overcome the real-virtual distinction all together. In analogy to the Thomas theoreme, a classic in sociology, his slogan is: 'If people define networks as real, they are real in their consequences.' For Benschop, internet is not some 'second-hand world'. The same could be said about the social. There is no second life, with other social rules and conventions. According to Benschop this is why there is, strictly speaking, no additional discipline necessary.[8] The discussion about the shape of the social relates to all of us and should not be cooked up—and owned— by geeks and startup entrepreneurs only.

The social is not merely the (digital) awareness of the Other, even though the importance of 'direct contact' should not be underestimated. There needs to be actual, real, existing interaction. This is the main difference between old broadcast media and the current social network paradigm. Interpassivity, the concept which points at a perceived growth of the delegation of passions and desires to others (the outsourcing of affect) as discussed for instance by Pfaller, Žižek and van Oenen is a nice but harmless concept in this (interactive)

context.[9] To question the current architectures and cultures of use of social media is not motivated by some kind of hidden, oppressed offline romanticist sentiment. Is there something like a justified feeling of overexposure not just to information in general but to others as well? We all need to have a break from the social circus every now and then but who can afford to cut off ties indefinitely? In the online context the social requires our constant involvement in terms of clicking. We need to make the actual link. Machines will not make the vital connection for us, no matter how much we delegate. It is no longer enough to build on your existing social capital. What social media does is algorithmically expand your reach — or that's at least at the promise.

Instead of merely experiencing our personal history as something that we reconcile with and feel the need to overcome (think of family ties, the village or suburb, school and college, church and colleagues from work), the social is seen as something that we are proud of, that we love to represent and show off. Social networking is experienced in terms of an actual potentiality: I could contact this or that person (but I won't). From now on I will indicate what my preferred brand is (even without being asked). The social is the collective ability to imagine the connected subjects as a temporary unity. The power of what it means to connect to many is felt by many. Simulation of the social on websites and in graphs are not so much secondary experiences or representations of something real but are probes into a post-literate world ruled by images.

Martin Heidegger's 'we don't call, we are being called' runs empty here.[10] On the net bots will contact you regardless, and the status updates of others, relevant or not, will pass by anyway. The filter failure is real. Once inside the busy flow of social media the 'call to being' comes from software and invites you to reply. This is where the cool and laid-back postmodern indifference as quasi-subversive attitudes comes to an end. It is meaningless not to bother. We are not friends anyway. Why stay on Facebook? Forget Twitter. These are cool statements — but beside the point. The silence of the masses Baudrillard spoke about has been broken. Social media has been a clever trick to get them talking. We have all been reactivated. The obscenity of common opinions and the everyday

life prostitution of private details is now firmly embedded in software and used by billions of users.

The example Baudrillard used at the time is the opinion poll that undermines 'the authentic existence of the social'. Baudrillard replaced the sad vision of the masses as an alienated entity by an ironic and object-centred one. Nowadays, thirty years deeper into the media era, even this vision has become internalised. In the Facebook age surveys can now be done continuously, without people's direct participation in questionnaires and the like, through data mining. These algorithmic calculations run in the background and measure every single click, touch of the keyboard and use of keywords. For Baudrillard this 'positive absorption into the transparency of the computer' is something worse than alienation.[11] The public has become a database full of users. The 'evil genius of the social' has no other way to express itself than to go back, to the streets and squares, guided and witnessed by the multitude of viewpoints that tweeting smart-phones and recording digital cameras produce. The subject as user leaves few options other than to troll in the comment section or continue as a lurker. Much in the same way as Baudrillard questioned the outcome of opinion polls as a subtle revenge of the common people on the political/media system, in the same way we should question the objective truth of the so-called big data originating from Google, Twitter and Facebook. Most of the traffic on social media originates from millions of computers talking to each other. An active participation of 10 per cent of the user base is high. They are assisted by an army of dutifully hard-working software bots, the rest are inactive accounts. This is what object-oriented philosophy has yet come to term with: a critique of useless contingency.

The social media system no longer 'plunges us in a state of stupor,' as Baudrillard described the media experience decades ago. Instead, it shows us the way to cooler apps and other products that elegantly make us forget yesterday's flavour of the day. We simply click, tap and drag the platform away, finding something else to distract us. This is how we treat online services: they are deserted and left behind, if possible on abandoned hardware. Within weeks we have forgotten the icon, bookmark or password. We do not have to revolt

against the new media of the Web 2.0 era, we can just leave them knowing that they will remain out there like the good old HTML ghost towns of the nineties.

Baudrillard thus summed up the situation of the old media: 'This is our destiny, subjected to opinion polls, information, publicity, statistics: constantly confronted with the anticipated statistical verification of our behaviour, absorbed by this permanent refraction of our least movements, we are no longer confronted with our own will.' He discussed the move towards obscenity that is made in the permanent display of one's own preferences (in our case on social media platforms). There is a 'redundancy of the social', a 'continual voyeurism of the group in relation to itself: it must at all times know what it wants … The social becomes obsessed with itself; through this auto-information, this permanent auto-intoxication.'

The difference between the 1980s when Baudrillard wrote these theses and the present is the opening up of all aspects of life to the logic of opinion polls. Not only do we have personal opinions about every possible event, idea or product, but these informal judgements are also interesting for the databases and search engines. People start to talk about products by themselves; they no longer need incentives from outside. Twitter goes for the entire spectre of life when it asks 'What's happening?' Everything, even the tiniest info spark provided by the online public is (potentially) relevant, ready to be earmarked as viral and trending, destined to be data-mined and, once stored, ready to be combined with other details. These devices of capture are totally indifferent to the content of what people say — who cares about your views? It's all just data to be mined, recombined and flogged off. That's network relativism. In the end it's all just data, their data. 'Victor, are you still alive?'[12] This is not about participation, remembrance and forgetting. What we transmit are the bare signals that we are still alive.

A deconstructivist reading of social media shouldn't aim, once again, to reread the friendship discourse ('from Socrates to Facebook') or take apart the online self. No matter how hard such a task is, theorists should shy away from their built-in 'interpassivity' impulse to call for a break ('book your offline holiday') as this position has played itself out. Instead,

we need cybernetics 2.0 initiatives such as a follow-up of the original Macy conferences (1946 to 1953) to investigate the cultural logic inside social media, insert self-reflexivity in code and ask what software architectures could be proposed to radically alter the online social experience. We need input from critical humanities and social science that starts a dialogue with computer science on an equal basis. Are 'software studies' initiatives up to such a task? Time will tell. Digital humanities with its one-sided emphasis on data visualisation, working with computer-illiterate humanities scholars as innocent victims, has so far made a bad start in this respect. We do not need more tools; what's required are large research programs that finally put critical theory in the driver's seat, run by technologically informed theorists. The submissive attitude towards the hard sciences and industries in arts and humanities needs to come to a close.

And how can philosophy contribute? The Western male self-disclosing subject no longer needs to be taken apart and contrasted with the liberated cyber-identity aka avatar that roams around the virtual game worlds. Interesting players in the new media game can be found across the globe, from Africa to the obvious players in Brazil, India and the greater China vicinity. For this IT-informed postcolonial theory has yet to be assembled. We should look at today's practices of the social as electronic empathy right in the eyes. How do you shape and administer your online affects? To put it in terms of theory, we need to extend Derrida's questioning of the Western subject to the non-human agency of software (as described by Bruno Latour and his ANT followers). Only then can we get a better understanding of the cultural policy of aggregators, the role of search engines or edit wars inside Wikipedia.

With its emphasis on Big Data we can read the 'renaissance of the social' in the light of sociology as the 'positivist science of society'. As of yet there is no critical school in sight that could help us to properly read the social aura of the citizen as user. The term 'social' has effectively been neutralised in its cynical reduction to data porn. Reborn as a cool concept in the media debate 'the social' manifests itself neither as dissent nor as subcultural. The social organises

the self as a techno-cultural entity, a special effect of software which real-time feedback features prove addictive for many users. In the internet context the social is neither a reference to the social question, nor a hidden reminder of socialism as a political program. The social is precisely what it pretends to be: a calculated opportunity in times of distributed communication. In the end the social turns out to be a graph, a more or less random collection of contacts on your screen that blabber on and on—until you intervene and put your own statement out there.

Thanks to Facebook's simplicity the online experience is deeply human: the aim is the Other, not information. Ideally, the Other is online, right now. Communication works best if it is 24/7, global, mobile, fast and short. Most appreciated is instantaneous exchange with befriended users at chat-mode speed. This is social media at its best. We are invited to 'burp out the thought you have right now—regardless of its quality, regardless of how it connects to your other thoughts'.[13] Social presence of young people is the default here (according to the scholarly literature). We create a social sculpture, and then, as we do with most conceptual and participatory artworks, abandon it, ready to be trashed by anonymous cleaners. This is most like the faith of all social media: it will be remembered as an individual experience of online community in the post-9/11 decade. And happily forgotten as the next distraction consumes our perpetual present.

It is said that social media have grown out of virtual communities (as described by Howard Rheingold in his 1993 book of that title) but who cares really about the larger historical picture here? Many doubt if Facebook and Twitter, in their current manifestations as platforms for the millions, are still generating authentic online community experiences. What counts are the trending topics, the next platform and the latest apps. Silicon Valley historians will one day explain the rise of 'social networking sites' out of the remains of the dotcom crisis when a handful of survivors from the margins of the e-commerce boom 'n' bust reconfigured viable concepts of the Web 1.0 era, stressing the empowerment of the user as content producer. The secret of Web 2.0, which kicked off in 2003, is the combination of (free) uploads of digital material with the

ability to comment on other people's efforts. Interactivity always consists of these two components: action and reaction. Chris Cree defines social media as 'communication formats publishing user generated content that allow some level of user interaction',[14] a problematic definition that could already include most of the early computer culture. It is not enough to limit social media to uploading and self-promotion. Social media are usually misunderstood if they are merely used as one-to-many marketing channels. It is the personal one-on-one feedback and small-scale viral distribution elements that cannot be left out.

As Andrew Keen indicates in *Digital Vertigo* the social in social media is first and foremost an empty container, with the internet 'becoming the connective tissue of twenty-first century life' as the example hollow phrase. According to Keen, the social is becoming a tidal wave that is flattening everything in its path. Keen warns that we will end up in an antisocial future, characterised by the 'loneliness of the isolated man in the connected crowd'.[15] Confined inside the software cages of Facebook, Google and their clones, users are encouraged to reduce their social life to 'sharing' information. The self-mediating citizen constantly broadcasts his or her state of being to an amorph, numb group of 'friends'. Keen is part of a growing number of (mainly) US critics who warn us of the side effects of extensive social media use. From Sherry Turkle's rant on loneliness, Nicholas Carr's warnings for the loss of brainpower and the lack of concentration, Evgene Morozov's critique of the utopian NGO world, to Jaron Lanier's concern over the loss of creativity, these commentators are united by their avoidance of a positive definition of the social. The problem here is the disruptive nature of the social, which returns as a revolt with an unknown, and often unwanted, agenda: vague, populist, radical-Islamist, driven by good for nothing memes.

The Other as opportunity, channel or obstacle? You choose. Never has it been so easy to 'auto-quantify' one's personal sur-roundings. We follow our blog statistics, the number of tweets, following and followers on Twitter, check out the friends of friends on Facebook or go on eBay to purchase a few hundred 'friends' who will then 'like' your latest uploaded pictures and

start a buzz about your latest outfit. Listen to how Dave Winer sees the future of news:

> Start a river, aggregating the feeds of the bloggers you most admire, and the other news sources they read. Share your sources with your readers, understanding that almost no one is purely a source or purely a reader. Connect everyone that's important to you, as fast as you can, as automatically as possible, and put the pedal to the metal and take your foot off the brake.[16]

This is how programmers these days glue everything loosely together with code. Connect persons to data objects to persons, that's the social today.

Notes

1   C. Chesher, 'How computer networks became social' in C. Chesher, K. Crawford, A. Dunn and S. Shaner, *Internet Transformations: Language, Technology, Media and Power* (forthcoming, 2015).

2   J. Baudrillard, 'The Masses: Implosion of the Social in the Media', *New Literary History* 16, no. 3, On Writing Histories of Literature (Spring, 1985): 577–89, 577.

3   All quotes from M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Declaration* (New York: Argo-Navis, 2012), 18–21.

4   Ibid., 35.

5   See the exchange 'The $100bn Facebook question: Will capitalism survive 'value abundance'?' on the nettime list, early March 2012. Brian Holmes writes there in different postings: 'What I have found very limiting in the discourse around so-called web 2.0 is the use of Marx's notion of exploitation in the strict sense, where your labor power is alienated into the production of a commodity and you get an exchange value in return.'; 'For years I have been dismayed by a very common refusal to think. The dismaying part is that it's based on the work of European history's greatest political philosopher, Karl Marx. It consists in the assertion that social media exploits you, that play is labor, and that Facebook is the new Ford Motor Co.'; 'The "apparatus of capture", introduced by Deleuze and Guattari and developed into a veritable political economy by the Italian Autonomists and the Multitudes group in Paris, does something very much like that, though without using the concept of exploitation.'; 'Social media do not exploit you the way a boss does. It emphatically _does_ sell statistics about the ways you and your friends and correspondents make use of your human faculties and desires, to nasty corporations that do attempt to capture your attention, condition your behavior and separate you from your money. In that sense, it does try to control you and you do create value for it. Yet that is not all that happens. Because you too do something with it, something of your own. The dismaying thing in the theories of playbour, etc, is that they refuse to recognise that all of us, in addition to being exploited and controlled, are overflowing sources of potentially autonomous productive energy. The refusal to think about this—a refusal which mostly circulates on the

left, unfortunately — leaves that autonomous potential unexplored and partially unrealised.'

6   E. Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

7   Private email correspondance with the author, 5 March 2012.

8   A. Benschop, *Virtual Communities*, http://www.sociosite.org/network.php.

9   See R. Pfaller, *Ästhetik der Interpassivität* (Hamburg: Plilo Fine Arts, 2008) and G. van Oenen, *Nu even niet! Over de interpassieve samenleving* (Amsterdam: van Gennep, 2011).

10   See A. Ronell, *The Telephone Book* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).

11   Baudrillard, 582.

12   Standard phrase from Professor Professor, a Bavarian character who speaks English with a heavy German accent in the BBC animation series *The Secret Show* (2006–07).

13   A. Giridharadas, 'A new, noisier way of writing', *New York Times*, 24 February 2012 <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/25/us/25iht-currents25.html?_r=1>.

14   See <http://successcreeations.com/438/definition-of-social-media/#ixzz1nJmIQl1c>.

15   A. Keen, *Digital Vertigo* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2012), 13.

16   D. Winer, 'What news must do', Scripting.com, 24 February 2012 <http://scripting.com/stories/2012/02/24/whatNewsMustDo.html>.

The Power of Doubt

Hou Hanru

Art is an imaginative, but equally realistic, way to approach and question the world. Creating an artwork, while mobilising all our faculties of imagination is, to a great extent, a process of creatively and critically demonstrating how we perceive reality by means of 'representation' in images, texts and other media. It inevitably involves doubts, questioning, investigation and interrogation regarding the real world, which, in turn, is permanently changing. By definition, an artwork in general results from doubting the real — not only the appearance of reality but also, more importantly, the substance of its existence, or, the truth. This is a process full of contradictions, an infinite adventure into the realm of the impossible since truth is by no mean unique and certain. Instead, it's always unstable, uncertain and multiple.

The invention of photography also implies a contradiction: it was devised to be the most immediate and loyal reflection of the real world, hence its reality, or truth. At the same time, however, it immediately raises the question of the reliability of the real-ness of the images that it reproduces, due to the variable factors involved in the process, the material and technical limits of the equipment, the environmental conditions, and so on. Hence, photography shows the reality of the world in images that are shockingly different from our retinal perception, while the intervention of the subjective approach of the photographer can radically complicate and alter the 'representative' nature of the image. The representational function of photography thus becomes an eternal problem. Instead of solving the problem in any finite way, it continuously sheds light (and casts a shadow) on the very tension between the necessity of questioning the real world and its relationship with our existence, and the impossibility of

answering the question. There are infinite doubts here. In our time, moving images on various material supports such as film and video, as well as computer-generated images, are introduced to substitute for conventional photography. Art production in general is also a process of producing our own impression, perception and conception of reality itself. Therefore, through what Arjun Appadurai might call the work of imagination, they are producing a world or, more precisely, different worlds, to our life, and these are becoming more real than the material one that is out there. The expressive power of the image depends on how much it can evoke our doubts *vis-à-vis* the real. It incarnates the power of doubt as the core of our reflection on the truth. It is this power of doubt that renders photography and, by extension, multimedia, the very substance of being a form of art. It is that which perfectly embodies the intervention of modernity in making our reality for the last centuries and continues to impact on the making of today's contemporaneity.

Our era is the one determined and shaped by digital technologies. Our existences and identities are continually transformed and redefined by interfaces in the form of flux of digitalised information: images and texts. These interfaces oscillate between facts and fictions. They constitute the contemporary substance of reality and truth. But they are, inevitably, fantastic and hallucinatory.

Art and artists today, like the world itself, are largely 'globalised'. Digital media, from still and moving images to the internet, are both the resources and materials for artistic production. Artists continue to confront, embrace, investigate and interrogate the nature of reality, truth and dreams. But the processes are unprecedentedly fluid, uncertain and precarious, while the outcomes are generating more suspense, doubts and critiques than conclusions or resolutions. The power of their thoughts and expressions lies precisely in this path of doubt.

This is particularly articulated in some specific contexts: locations that are experiencing heavier social transformations than other parts of the world, namely, societies forced to negotiate with transitions from a historically traumatised condition, a seemingly open and liberated globalised world.

A world that violently imposes fictions of happiness and peace by flattening reality into an interface that compresses every human activity into an act of communicating a single truth. Behind the 'freedom' of expression and communication provided by Google, Facebook and iPhone, and so on, in the field of economy we have only one option: to survive in a liberal capitalist system. In the meantime, politically, we are expected to embrace the hegemony of one kind of 'democracy' dictated by the logic of global imperialism. Individuals, collectives and societies are increasingly reduced to instruments serving the realisation of this hegemony while, ironically, we are 'informed' that we have gained much more freedom than ever before. Here lies the fundamental paradox of our time. This tension is particularly visible among, and drastically expressed by, those who have been striving to emancipate themselves from the older traumas of colonialism, communism and 'backwardness', and who are now facing the challenge of viable emancipations from the globalised world of liberal capitalism and neoimperialism. Artists, as the most sensitive and imaginative individuals, continue to lead the struggle for such emancipation, not unlike during the 'underground avant-garde' years through the Cold War and anti-colonial era. They should perfectly incarnate the power of doubt.

'The Power of Doubt' superimposes site-specific installations and works in various new and old media and is somehow rooted in photography as a model of perception.[1] These works embody the necessity of doubting the 'mainstream' way of seeing, recording and communicating the real world, which, again, oscillates between spectacular 'truths' and dramatic fictions. Most of the artists are from regions like China or Eastern Europe that have experienced drastic changes from communism to capitalism, or South Asia or Africa, where people continue to negotiate possibilities of life between colonial legacy and present geopolitical conflicts while searching for solutions with which to deconstruct the double-bind *status quo*, blocked by postcolonial and neoliberal systems. With diverse interests in artistic and intellectual pursuits, the artists give voice to the collective doubts and desires of their

societies. They are more or less directly responding to some of the most urgent issues influencing our common life today and 'haunting' our obsessive pursuit of truth.

We are living in a time of global wars — a state of exception that replaces normal existence and is perpetuated by the power of the Global Empire, as pointed out by scholars like Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt. In our everyday life and imaginary, we are living with and, often, within, the state of war. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as in Chechnya and Somalia, are regular headlines in newspapers, while other regional and international conflicts such as those between Palestine and Israel, India and Pakistan and so on, are marking our daily conversations. At the same time, memories of past wars in Vietnam and Lebanon, among others, still haunt our consciousness and nightmares. They inescapably constitute a crucial part of the issues examined by contemporary artists, especially those whose personal experiences are intimately related to such events.

Shaun Gladwell from Australia, an ally of the United States that has sent its soldiers to 'maintain' peace in Afghanistan, visited 'Camp Holland', a military base near Tarin Kowt, a southern Afghan town that has been purportedly omitted on Google Maps. He invited a couple of soldiers to perform a piece with video cameras, filming each other against the setting of the quasi-invisible military camp. Instead of showing the violent aspects of the war, the artist chooses to expose a more subtle, but somehow more brutal side of it. Seeing his work as way of leaking the official secret of the location and the human activities carried out there, he attempts to demonstrate the possibility of dealing with the limbo of the war.[2] In the current climate, one can easily relate this work with the heroic actions of Wikileaks, a website founded by one of Gladwell's 'compatriots', Australian Julian Assange. More interestingly, Gladwell, inspired by Dan Graham's famous experiments in *Helix/Spiral* (1973), with video cameras merging with the bodies as tools for exploring the relationship between perception, body and public space, intelligently set up a double-channel video installation, which formed a total environment where the spectator experiences
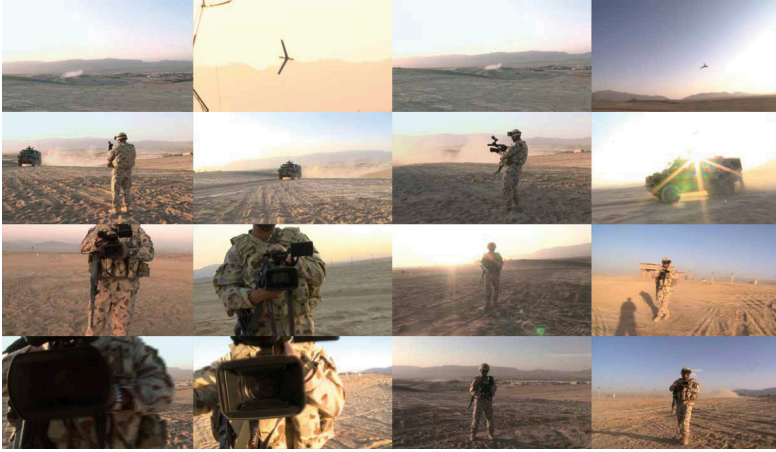
3   Shaun Gladwell
     Double Field/Viewfinder (Tarin Kowt), 2009-10

a strong sense of participation in the situation. (Figure 3) This war is not something happening 'out there'. It takes place here, where we are standing.

Dihn Q Lê, a Vietnamese artist who fled his country at the age of eight at the end of the Vietnam War, grew up in California and returned to Ho Chi Mihn City in the late 1990s. He has been obsessively exploring the memory of the war and its impacts on contemporary life ever since. For him, the painful memory is not simply personal: it is a common source for several generations' imagination. Ironically, this collective memory of a difficult historical period, which still exerts considerable influence on today's society, has become an imaginative and economic resource for the mainstream media — including the Hollywood film industry — to impose certain ideological and political conceptions of verity, namely propaganda on behalf of the superpower. Multiple images of the 'reality', or 'truths', of the war experiences, are superimposed, fused and confused. How to go about exposing and resisting such a perverse exploration of pain and memory has become the central concern in his artistic and ethical struggle. Doubting and challenging the Hollywood-style 'truth' has hence become his preoccupation. In his photo-collage series 'From Vietnam to Hollywood', he demonstrates the entangling and intriguing limbo of memory, weaving real and fictional images together. In his more recent animation video *South China Sea Pishkun*, Lê turns his interpretation of the tragic crashes of the last American helicopters retreating from Vietnam into satirically amplified performances, in a reference to *pishkun*, a Native American tradition of handling animals.

Shaun Gladwell's and Dinh Q Lê's half-critical and half-playful reappropriations of war experiences are echoed in Shahzia Sikander's film *Bending the Barrels* (2009). Originally from Pakistan and now living in New York, the artist has created complex but poetic works ranging from painting through calligraphy to video to explore the tension between cultural hybridity and geopolitical conflicts as the driving force in the formation of a nation's imaginary and self-identification. In *Bending the Barrels*, she revisits the history and current situation of her country, prompted by the instability, uncertainty

and violence of its struggle for independence and democracy. It is an endless negotiation, or power bargain, between politicians and the military, while the voices of civil society has been largely silenced. Documenting the pageantry of military marching band in a mixture of colonial and traditional styles along with authoritative military pronouncements, the artist's aim is to reflect on 'the paradox of authority' and demonstrate 'a sense of uneasiness and pending crisis'.[3]

Contemporary geopolitical conflicts such as warfare in Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan and the confrontations between the global imperialist power and the rebellions of civil society in different localities (such as the current civil uprisings in Arab countries against their authoritarian leaderships, who are supported by the West) are intrinsically rooted in the unsolved heritage of postcolonial struggles across the globe. The globalisation of media culture — with the intervention of media powers such as CNN live news broadcasts and Hollywood-style clichés and iconography — intensifies this conflictive process, while substituting the factual reality with propagandist imagery. This further raises questions and suspicions about the truth of history, especially its real nature, and of the transition from colonial past to contemporary globalisation and its impact on our perception, imagination and conception. Ironically, at the same time, it opens up a territory in which artists can critically probe and reinterpret the issues of historicity and truth. 'New Media' such as photography, video and digital image making are hence endowed with a new function, as sites of 'reality' production.

Wong Hoy Cheong, a Kuala Lumpur–based artist, scholar and political activist, has researched and explored the rich, complicated and often challenging history of Malaysia, from its colonial past to contemporary reality, in his multimedia work, which includes drawings, performance, installation and video. His black and white photographic series 'Chronicle of Crime' ventures into the terrain from a particularly accurate and efficient angle, by reenacting the roles of some 'legendary' Malaysian criminals to expose 'slipperiness between the real and imagined, the lived trauma and aestheticised re-enactments', and 'the momentary silences, pauses and tensions that exist between the moments of before and

after — before and after the crime, before and after death; the moments of moral decisions and accomplishment'.[4] This tension, or inbetween-ness, provokes a suspension of reality, a reality deeply entangled in its unsolvable negotiations with postcolonial conditions and globalisation. Behind the uncannily playful appearances of the film-noir/Bollywood cool looks of the 'criminals', one can decipher a kind of existential anxiety, an ontological void. Inevitably, this recalls the collective psychological crisis and distorted identity of a nation, so powerfully stated in Frantz Fanon's formula 'black skin, white mask'.

The New York–based Kenyan Wangechi Mutu expresses this mixed sentiment of anxiety and suspicion in an even more straightforward and dramatic fashion, by adding a feminist dimension to them with her eccentrically complex, agonising but exuberantly beautiful magazine photo collage works. Oscillating between the sublime and the absurd, between sarcasm and pain, between sensual joy and sexual abuse, they are portraits of black women — the artist is one of them. More accurately, they are portraits of those whose existences have been deformed and reduced to impersonalised stereotypes of race and sex in consumer fashion or porn magazines. They are the media-age version of the violated subjects of colonial power and geopolitical exploitation. They are turned into a kind of interface of a falsified reality, hidden behind the mask of the official truth of colonialism and transnational capitalism. In parallel, Thierry Fontaine from the French overseas territory La Réunion, also employs to the format of portraiture or, more precisely, self-portraiture, to express such a violently emptied form of existence, or 'de-subjectisation'. More importantly, he also renders an expressive form to his desire to resist and revolt against such a condition of silencing and oppression. Thierry Fontaine's life, like his skin colour, is a kind of *métissage*, ultimately intimately rooted in the soil of the colony-island where the question of belonging, identity and dignity, like the muddy colour of the earth itself, has been forever suspended. The only way for him to show his face to the public gaze is to mask himself with mud. And his voice can only be audible behind the muteness of the earth. His large-scale photos of self-portraits — named '*Les Cris* (Screams)',

and 'Echo'—are the ultimate outcry of such an impossible existence.

Echoing this outcry of the *impasse* of human conditions, the Hong Kong–based Tsang Kin-Wah is a young witness of the postcolonial transition of the last British colony to the 'motherland', China. He comes up with poetic and sophisticated but sarcastic words spelled out in multimedia installations, with mixture of floral forms, religious and political texts and swear words found in the media. The Seven Seal series, referring to Christian eschatology with bible citations like 'They Are Already Old. They Don't Need to Exist Anymore', announces this end of the world with the arrival of the 'Last Judgement' in a subtle, poetical but profoundly ambivalent form. Utilising the most advanced technology of computer programs and video projection, he drives this contradiction further, rendering the very nature of doubt in his work even more striking. The electronically animated eschatological messages invade the space and seize one's soul like ghosts.

The contemporary human conditions, in the age of globalisation and the triumph of a certain dominant model of modernity, namely the Western one, that has defined and ruled the concept of humanity, truth and hierarchy of civilisations and hence the power relationship of the world over the last centuries, are now facing some fundamental distrusts and challenges. Artists living in transnational and transcultural situations of exile, migration and constant displacement are among those most sensitive in this respect. They rise up to contest the taken-for-granted order of things. Adel Abdessemed, a French artist of Algerian origin, is one of the most radical adventurers in this movement of contestation, with his particularly pungent strategy of attacking the established taboos of civilisation and boundary. His photographic works, including *Sept Frère*, *Séparation*, *Zéro Tolérance*, *Jumps a Jolt*, feature animals like wild boars, snakes, lions and donkeys loitering in the Parisian street. And the artist is 'playing with them' like a brother. In *Nafissa* and *Mes Amis*, the artist's mother, wife and children are invited to act in the same setting with the artist or animals or even skeletons, to enact the most unlikely street theatres. The artist claims that the street is his atelier. Here, it is not only the boundary between

art and everyday life that is broken down. The separations between man and nature, between life and death, which are so fundamentally crucial for the existence of the Western idea of humanity, are also blurred. The title of the work in which the artist's wife poses as a bride of a gorilla tells us all (quoting a Crittercam advertisement and inspired by Donna Haraway's *When Species Meet*): *Anything Can Happen When An Animal Is Your Cameraman.*[5]

Abdessemed's provocation evokes a critical querying of our existence: how to live with the other—human vs animal, city vs nature? This is indeed the most urgent but eternally unsolvable question. In our age of acceleration of human displacement, migration, encounter and negotiation, this question is deeply affecting our life. The coexistence of differences—racial, religious, cultural and political—is now the most real form of life. Every individual has to learn how to deal with a stranger as their closest neighbour and to embrace a foreign body. The premise for such an openness towards and merging with the other is to put one's self in question and suspend it. This may lead us to the paradise of human common destiny. However, how much one can really doubt about and suspend one's own identity and embrace the other? The Pakistani artist Hamra Abbas—an apparent Muslim now living in the United States—has made an elegant but somehow unlikely proposal in her new works: to perform massage on a white female body with her own 'coloured' hands in an Orientalist-style *hammam* and name it 'Paradise Bath'. At the same time, using the 'new' technology of Photoshop, she also proposes to erase the minarets of the mosques—the most emblematic sign of Islam and now an exotic signifier for tourist consumption of the other—in Istanbul, the Eurasian metropolis. At the time when the West is in a fanatical panic about the 'Islamic threats' and is cowardly rejecting Turkey's participation in the European community, can this act of erasure become a friendly compromise, despite the absurdity of the act itself?

Yes, the expansion of the European community may be a turning point for the global future. But where to and how to turn are actually the most difficult questions. The collapse of the Soviet Bloc and the end of the Cold War, along with the 'triumph' of neoliberal capitalism, are the dynamics

behind such an ambitious but highly ambivalent project. In the process, doubts and contests, along with uncertainties and fears about the direction to turn, are aroused. The most drastic reactions to such confusions are most visibly sensed by the populations in former communist countries—they have to make the 'transition', to surrender to the West and accept the 'virtues' of capitalism and democracy. This 'transition' is being carried out in the most ambivalent manner: material life seems to be improved for some, while the population is divided into rich and poor ones. Individuals are gaining apparent freedom while being thrown into the spiral of solitude and insecurity. One way for those intrigued by the confusion and struggling to survive this limbo-like condition, is to convince themselves that life is simply a drama of self-mockery, mixing hope, memory, nostalgia and aspiration, in a 'melting pot'. And the artists do it best: Dan Perjovschi, a Romanian artist who was a leader of the underground art movement during the communist years, has developed a personal language to satirically reinterpret media stories—from propaganda to commercial advertisement via all kinds of news headlines and celebrity gossip, as well as the hypocrisy of the art world—in simple chalk and marker drawings, to demonstrate the inherent paradox and absurdity of the 'truth' imposed by the media as powerful force to bring about the transition towards the dream of 'democracy'. Perjovschi's gestures appear to be light and easy. But they are capable of turning everything upside-down and subverting established values. His recent research has led him to a new experiment. For the exhibition, 'The Power of Doubt' under the title: *Looking around: one random drawing and some snapshots*, he created another site-specific work with both drawings and snapshot photos that recollect traces of 'accidentally' small, ignored and forgotten fragments of objects, signs and scenes in the city that most intimately and genuinely memorise the impacts of the social transition on the everyday environment. They are like Hitchcock's MacGuffins: barely visible, they haunt our unconsciousness. The Bulgarian Nedko Solakov, another leader of the underground scene in the Soviet Bloc, now internationally acclaimed, also intervenes in a similar process of retracing the memory of the past and wrestling

with the present. Resorting to the narrative model of the fairy-tale, he produced a huge number of illustrations and texts that demonstrate the paradox of the official truth and the helplessness of individuals facing the absurdity of reality. They are often conceived and shown site-specifically as installations with other media. Now, he has decided it's time to make a significant shift to open himself up to a new generation, to catch up with how the transition of social models are affecting youth and himself as a father. Hence, he developed a project with his son Dimitar, a teenaged photographer who has documented the new underground life of his friends, to come up with a father and son dialogue mutually commenting between themselves in the form of photo–text book. It is a testimony to the new complications between two generations in terms of mutual understanding facing the social transition. Is revolution an infinite endeavour to be inherited by all future generations? Or is it simply an empty promise?

This transition, or transformation, from an old age of ideological division to a kind of global consensus to embrace the 'promised land' of neoliberal capitalism, has some spectacular features—urban expansion and commoditisation of everything in life, including human relations. Transformation is seen in its most intense and dramatic expressions in the economical boom of the Asia Pacific region, especially in the giant China, a new Far West for all global capitalist adventurists. Chinese cities are the new battlefields of such an adventure: the urban spaces are going through unprecedented expansions with the real estate market as the main engine driving the economic growth. In the meantime, urbanisation and gentrification are pushing the poor and the locals out of urban centres, causing further social divisions and conflicts. This paradoxical logic of development is now seeing its limits, with the rise of human drama, corruption, violence and environmental crisis. The government, hand in hand with capital, is tightening social and cultural controls to maintain apparent stability at the price of scarifying basic human rights and freedoms. Facing the oppression of the powerful, the general public from both urban and rural areas are mounting protest campaigns and resistance, while a great number of intellectuals and legal professionals are becoming increasingly

aware of their new responsibility as agents of questioning and challenging the 'reality' and 'truth' imposed by authority. They are mounting rallies to defend civic rights. A considerable number of artists are also engaging their imagination and creativity in the tasks of testifying and exposing social conflicts, by producing art works that document, denounce and criticise this dire situation. Irony, humour, poetry and even playfulness are the most potent and effective expressions to confront social, political and individual confrontations. This is also a time when collective desire for 'growth' becomes totally frenetic, while ultimately every individual is feeling deeply isolated and lonely. Everything is doubtful. Everyone is hoping for a way out, facing a reality that is becoming extremely surreal. Jiang Zhi's photographic series like 'Things would turn unbelievable once they happened', and 'Things would turn illusive once they happened', are among the most extraordinarily poetic and poignant works produced in the Chinese art scene. They are highly personal and poetic reflections on the uncanny sentiment of being at once alienated from and still aspiring to transcend such a dreadful world. Eventually, it is by grasping such a tension and transforming it into a kind of surrealistic illumination that Jiang Zhi's work gains immense power. However, no one can really escape from the reality. The only way to continue to live is to fight for one's own right. Jiang Zhi's 'Things would turn nails once they happened', by shedding a kind of angelic light on the famous Wu's 'nail family house' in Chongqing—a symbol of lower class urban inhabitants' resistance to gentrification widely mediated in the press, which incited great social and political debates across the country—turns such a human drama into a glorious moment of tragic sublime and comic hope.[6]

   This exuberant and excessive urban expansion is the official dream of the globalised world. From Shanghai to Dubai, from Mumbai to Mexico City, officials and capitalists are celebrating this new opportunity for development and self-empowerment. They paint it with most spectacular pictures. With forests of high-rise buildings and crowded highways, they cook up dreamlands beyond human imagination. Utopia returns eternally: this is a new promised heaven where people are going to happily live together and forever... Once

again, Chinese cities are the avant-gardes of such a 'historical achievement'. However, as we have seen above, reality always unfolds itself to an oppositional direction. Utopia is no more than dystopia—behind the shining glass walls of brand new skyscrapers, prosperity is always accompanied with chaos and even disaster. The urbanscape series 'Super Towers' by Du Zhenjun, a Paris based artist of Shanghai origin, demonstrates this perfectly. Instead of showing a 'primitive communist paradise', he turns the new Chinese cities into new Babel towers. He presents a contemporary version of apocalypse: hardly have the new towers—symbols of newly gained wealth and superpower—been built than they are already on fire and the earth flooded. The opening ceremony is orchestrated with earthquake and war. Du's catastrophic scenarios are obviously reminiscent of Bosch's infernal scenes. However, nothing is really fictional or surrealistic here. They are all images of real events. Indeed, all the images appearing here are entirely collected by the artist from news reports on the internet. The internet is the new interface of our reality today. The reality, while being reduced to digital pixels, has become a pool of ready-mades that substitute the truth. This strategy of resorting to the new ready-mades, interestingly, proves to be the most efficient demonstration of the real potential of our present and future, even they seem to be so unlikely.

This is how we recount our reality today, and probably how we will write our history in the future. Is history simply a collage of accidental events on the way, in humanities' endless search for the end of History, namely, Utopia? Does this search always end up falling into the opposite side of our aspiration—Dystopia? This has been the core obsession of our existence. It means something even more significant for those who have been living through 'historical transitions'—devoting their lives to emancipate themselves from oppression in order to achieve the dream of freedom and well-being. Sun Xun is a Beijing-based young artist who grew up in the post-revolution era in which China has fervently embraced the seemingly contradictory alliance of neoliberal capitalism and social control. Indeed, this alliance is the most reasonable and efficient one, since both camps are, in reality, the ultimate incarnations of the biopolitical manipulation of our way of

living. Sun Xun has been concentrating all his endeavours on revisiting, inquiring and subverting the official version of history, especially the established narrative of the making of the nation-state as truth and faith towards power and order, much propagated by authority. Different from the last generation of artists, who committed their lives to direct confrontation and quasi-physical fighting against authoritarian control, censorship and repression, Sun Xun pursues his interrogation in a dispassionate, distant, enduring and metaphysical manner while resorting only to traditional handmade techniques to produce his site-specific installations. These blend drawing, painting and animation films to express his mistrust of History. He has invented an alter ego of History, incarnated in the personage of the Magician that haunts all the scenes of his amazing animation films. The Magician is the professional in forging falsehood to replace reality: 'Magicians are the authority! A lie is the truth! And it's cheap!'[7] Naming his recent film '21 KE'—a summary of his decade-long investigations and work of imagination—he sets up a stage on which the soul (supposedly weighing 21 grams, or *ke* in Chinese) flies away from the body. This soulless body, following the conjuring stick of the Magician, is plunged into a black hole of History: 'History is a circle, irregular but relatively standard round. It is full of regrets, and *pi* is not a true formula anymore; any revolution is a lame compass, keeps turning ungratefully, and ends up with nothing.'[8]

Therefore, reality and fiction, lie and truth, are all turned into a meaningless chaos, a *huntun* in the Chinese ontological term—amusingly, the famous Chinese dumpling *wonton* earns its name from such a messy but somehow poetic picture of the Cosmos. Our perception of the world has completely lost its reliability. We are no longer able to really see the world through our senses. Hence, doubting the credibility of our perception is simply useless. We can see the world without using our eyes! Pak Sheung-Chuen, a Hong Kong–based artist who considers tricks to detour and distort his everyday experiences as his real artistic work—including eating *wonton* as a daily food—invites us to participate in a game: how to see the world without using eyes. In his project, 'A Travel Without Visual Experience', he joined a tourist group to Malaysia with

his eye blindfolded. He took photos of the tourist spots on the trip without being able to see them himself. Then, he installed the photos in a darkroom decorated with typical Malaysian domestic wall paper and broadcast the ambient sounds recorded during the trip. The audience is invited to enter the darkroom with a compact camera. They shoot the views with the flash. This is the only moment they can actually 'see' the images or the actual people, landscapes and objects that the artist has not been able to see. In the darkness, we ask: what have we really seen? Does it show us how the world really is?

'The Power of Doubt', by bringing together this wide range of artistic imaginations, sought to confront the question of the truth. Or, more precisely, to allow us to doubt together. It is in sharing this doubt that we feel our existence. Stimulated by the accidental and flashy moments of enlightening, we continue to strive to live together. At the same time, we continue to doubt … about everything.

This is how life appears meaningful to us; and making art still worthwhile…

Notes

1   H. Hanru, *The Power of Doubt* (Madrid: Photo Espana, 2011).
2   S. Gladwell, notes on *Double Field*, Afghanistan, email to the author, 20 August 2010.
3   S. Sikander, statement on *Bending the Barrels*, 2009, in Hanru.
4   Wang Hoy Cheong's statement on *Chronicles of Crime*, in Hanru.
5   D. Harraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).
6   H. Hanru, 'Living with(in) the urban fiction (notes on urbanization and art in post-Olympic China)', *Yishu, Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* (May – June 2009).
7   S. Xun, Statement on *21 KE,* leaflet (Shanghai: Minsheng Art Museum, 2010.
8   Ibid.

II: The Geography of the Imagination

The imaginations of artists can begin in a specific place and develop into ever-expanding possibilities. The freedom of the imagination is not in opposition to the understanding that it begins from a fixed location. Imagination can be used to reflect back the view of a reality that waits just around the corner, to generate a vision of another reality that is based on elements that already exist in the here and now, as well as to split the singular conception of reality into a myriad of directions. In this section the theme of place is central to the work of the imagination. The chapters focus on the current tendency in contemporary art to generate a dialogue between global issues and local experiences. This bifocal approach seeks to both deprovincialise the cultural imaginary by extolling the aesthetic value of artistic production from the periphery and reconfigure the spatial frame through which the local, regional and global interact.

Cuauhtémoc Medina is a writer and curator based in Mexico City who engages with the brutal exigencies of contemporary societies on the verge of implosion; Danae Stratou is an artist originating from Athens who has travelled all continents of the world to examine the functions of dividing walls; the Native American artistic collective Postcommodity and Australian artist Callum Morton explore the complex politics of stigmatic identity and the capacities to retrieve alternative histories, and finally the lucid and lyrical poet/curator Ranjit Hoskote contemplates a regional cultural framework that intervenes between rigid nationalism and unfettered globalism.

These are the imaginings that combine an old universalism with new kind of globalism. The shared interest in aesthetics is not an attempt to announce the triumphant return of the repressed, but rather one to demonstrate the need for rethinking both the general role of the imagination in cosmopolitan visions of the world and the specific visual practices that have emerged in the contemporary art scene. It is a critical methodology that not only goes beyond the Eurocentric foundations of art history by acknowledging the diverse contributions to contemporary global culture, but also develops new theoretical and speculative approaches to the relations between different cultural and geographic fields,

while at the same time it reevaluates the function of both individual and collective imagination in contemporary knowledge production. This approach is focused on the redistribution of agency in the production of meaning and event and also concerned with tracing the participant's capacity to imagine their place in the world as a whole. It offers a critique of a rootless cosmopolitan figure while grounding the jagged forms of cosmopolitanism that are produced by the displaced and disenfranchised. It highlights the hybrid practices of artists as they translate local forms with the other forms found in the regional neighborhood and global environment. It challenges the presumption of separation and exclusion by revitalising ethics of hospitality through the aesthetic prism of curiosity. Finally, it promotes a call for new social and political forms of collaboration in a global public sphere.

NP & VL

Seeing Red

Cuauhtémoc Medina

I: No more billboards!

On Thursday 16 February 2012, Mexican President Felipe Calderón unveiled a peculiar mural relief, on the Mexican side of the Córdova de las Américas International Bridge that connects the American city of El Paso, Texas, with the most dangerous city on earth: Ciudad Juárez in the Mexican State of Chihuahua. The 8 metre by 21 metre billboard, written in English language like any good Latin American artwork, was not devoid of a self-reflective materiality. Purportedly made with three tonnes of metal from the destruction of illegal weaponry seized by the Mexican police and army, the work points towards a completely new genre: *official postconceptualism*. It is, in fact, text-based art with a message. President Calderon's mural (as he specified in the opening ceremony) makes a polite plea to the 'amigos' from the United States of America to stop the 'terrible violence' pervading Mexico by reducing their consumption of drugs and limiting the sale of assault weapons.[1] Unless you count Hugo Chavez's antics as a contribution to the history of performance art, the mural suggests a remarkable moment of political expression, where a head of government feels the need to grant words a self-reflective materiality, somehow suggesting that the medium of politics (images and words) had been superseded by the weight and materiality of the current situation. This is the monumental text-based artwork devised by a southern nation state that seems to have surrendered the old fashioned means of diplomatic pressure, to turn to aesthetic means of persuasion, to turn the tautological ontology of image-text art into a political photo opportunity. For that sentence to acquire a monumental mass, it would imply that the words of Calderon

have had to fall into a field of aesthetic uncertainty: the space of castrated speech.

One of the characteristics of billboards is that, besides being a surface to display a visual message, they block the view of the landscape. In fact, if we turn our view to other visual actions of the Calderon regime (2006–2012), like the colossal photographic images of idealised policemen that they have attached to certain public buildings in the cities, it will become apparent that the government wishes to cover the whole of the visual field. It was not until 2012 that the Mexican Government has tried to divert the attention of the media and the audience from the carnage of the so called 'Mexican Drug War' to the complicity of the United States as consumers and weapon providers. All in all, Calderon's turn to sculpture is related to the monumental failure of the main policy of his administration. In the 1990s, partly pushed by the US endorse-ment of the right wing paramilitary government of Colombia, the centre of gravity of the drug traffic in the Americas moved north. Economically, this meant that networks of distribution in Mexico have prevailed over the centres of production in the Andes. However, the turning point of the crisis of violence has to be credited to the intervention of the government. After officially winning with a minimum margin the polemical presidential election of July 2006, Felipe Calderón was about to become a weakened president. Just when he had assumed office, in December 2006, he declared war on drug traffickers, mobilising six thousand army troops to chase the so-called 'Familia' of the Michoacan State. Starting from that moment, Calderón deployed around forty-five thousand troops around the country, which rather than stopping violence have collabo-rated in its fantastic escalation. The death toll climbed steeply during the first year of Calderon's from 62 people killed in 2006 to 2477 in 2007. Since then, the country has witnessed a geometrical progression of death and institutional failure. In November 2011 the administration admitted that more than forty-seven thousand people had been murdered both in the battles of the cartels and the operations of the Mexican police and army, turning this into one of the deadliest conflicts in the recent history of the continent. In January 2012 the admin-istration refused to make any further casualty figures public,

claiming such information was a matter of national security. The approaching presidential elections in the summer of 2012 may be one of the elements that have made such information suddenly so sensitive, conversely turning the current president vocal, for the first time, in begging Americans to cut down their legal and illegal chemical pleasures. But we ought to count also the outgoing administration's concern about its historical assessment, and the possibility that the figures that had been published until 2011 were, in reality, grossly underestimated. The Mexican drug war might have caused more than a hundred thousand victims in just six years, to become effectively the bloodiest conflict on earth at the beginning of the twenty-first century.[2]

Where to stand when the field of so-called 'poetic-politics' gets expanded not towards the poetical toolbox of activism, but in the aestheticisation of southern demagogy? Does the fact that a repressive right wing president turns to such means of expression put the legitimacy of contemporary artistic practices into question? Such was the conclusion that the so-called 'Comité Invisible Jaltenco' (Jaltenco Invisible Committee) arrived at when it commented on the case in an article that circulated both by email and the internet in February 2012.[3] According to the committee—an anonymous art-critical entity that for a number of years has been chastising local contemporary art as entirely subservient to neoliberal politics—there are clear analogies to be traced between President Calderon's billboard and other 'situational' works by Mexican artists working 'within the sphere of symbolic and perceptual work towards a permanent design of information and creativity'.[4] In the view of the Jaltenco Committee, works like Pedro Reyes's action *Palas por pistolas* (*Shovels for pistols)* that invite the population to 'turn weapons into shovels to plant trees' and suggest a turn towards development and production rather than destruction in crime infested cities like Culiacan (2008) or Juárez (2012), were akin to the president attempting to involve participatory practices into a 'condescending pedagogy' on the population.[5] What troubled the committee was probably that both artist and government were agreed that weapons should be taken away from the hands of the civilians; however, their methodologies were not, in any form, similar.

President Calderón did not indulge in any form of participatory work, nor did he intend to transform the values of the local population, as he was entirely focused on the gimmick of a foreign affairs gesture. One could put into question Pedro Reyes' claims that his work has social and climate benefit, and feel disturbed by the naive nature of his claims of raising 'awareness about gun and drug related violence both sides of the border', but corny as his politics are, they do not make a physical statement. Were we to compare the methodologies of the president's billboard with any other artwork, we would probably need to also discuss it against a work like Santiago Sierra's action of tracing the word *Submission* as a massive burning land art sign on the border (2008) which was, in fact, censored by the municipal authorities.[6]

Reyes's 'constructive spirit' is, indeed, corny and his social project dubious in kind. To claim that such a limited and moralistic exchange has a social pedagogical effect appears delusional, and the moral undertone of the whole operation, and its claim to transform violence into ecology, evades the economic, political and even gender structures behind the social tragedy of the place. Sierra's political commentary on the abject dependence of the Mexican policies unto the command from the American Empire seems to me to carry at least an outward critique. But beyond the relatively significant question of what is exactly the artistic moment of the president's work (either the seizure of weapons or the billboard itself), I think it is reasonable to say that, given the politicised nature of a significant amount of contemporary art imagery, we ought to be more intrigued by the fact that a head of state condescends to produce a sculpture of sorts, rather than in finding analogies between contemporary artworks and effective political forms. The mimetic character of most works involved in some kind of intervention aesthetics today implies that artists constantly refer to the media, codes and forms developed by any forms of political propaganda and action, even if, in purely chronological terms, here the politicians appear as belated newcomers in relation to the display of visual and symbolical gestures performed for years by artists and activists alike in the border region.

Notwithstanding Jaltenco's diagnosis of the alleged

complicity of the (Mexican) art world with the neoliberal necropolitical project might be overstated, it is symptomatic of the disputed nature of the politics of art in the face of the latest Mexican butchery. It would appear there is a certain poetic friction (and theoretical agony) between works and words like the ones we are commenting on, precisely because, in a complicated way, contemporary art traverses the space of public opinion without necessarily accommodating its rules. Rather than subsuming all those cultural gestures to the late arrival of a president who, surprisingly, decided to modernise his rhetoric and aesthetic, we ought to entertain the possibility that (although marginally) contemporary artworks are not foreign to the space of representation and debates that shape the current crisis. Surely, that exposes the artists to fall into moments of both demagogy and opportunism. But it is only through taking that risk that they can pretend to be perceived as political well beyond the communication of their individual wishes and political leanings.

II: The new south

In 2009 Edgardo Aragon, a young artist born in 1985 in the Southern Mexican State of Oaxaca, made a sudden break-through into the contemporary art scene that accounts for more than just an individual, it represents an entire shift of class sensibilities. Despite the historical significance that the image of the peasant and the aesthetics of rural life have for the culture of postrevolutionary Mexico, and for the fabrica-tion of stereotypes that the country exports, the realm of contemporary visual production and artistic practices is rarely accessible to the children of the countryside. The Mexican art world remains to a great extent—much like the casts of TV advertisements and soap operas—a preserve for the small white bourgeoisie of Mexico City and the cosmopolitan circuit that extends it. Thus, there is historical significance in the ways this enclave of cultural privilege is being put into ques-tion by the arrival of new geographies.

As has happened with literature and cinema, changing circumstances have forced the Mexican art world to expand to integrate different geographical belongings; somehow having to absorb the creative energy from both Tijuana and Sinaloa

in the north, and the irruption of artists from the deep south. This window of opportunity for inclusion and decentralisation has had little to do with policies of inclusion and good will. No matter how much we hate to admit it, violence has always had a revolutionary role. The recent upsurge of violence produced since 2006 by the internal wars among the drug cartels and by their fight with the Mexican state has radically transformed the structures of living and production, as well as the identity of the subjects of a place and the codes, referents and issues that are assumed as part of the cultural imaginary of a historical moment. In an era defined by the media spectacle, the primary effect of violence is to sequester public opinion and attention. Thus it is undeniable that the generalisation of violence in Mexico over the past decade has forced a change in the visibility of the place.

In *Efectos de familia/Family Effects* (2010), Edgardo Aragon invited several of his cousins and nephews in the town of Otumba, Oaxaca, to re-enact before the camera a number of traumatic family stories. Presented as children's games of sorts, the videos appear more sinister as they are screened without any explicit commentary. Some of the works are extremely cryptic—a boy looking at a crumbled piece of paper floating on a river that he then folds into a small paper boat only to later attempt to sink it with rocks; a fight between two boys pretending to guard the barbed wire fence dividing two plots of land; a scene where one boy stops the advance of his SUV on a road several times until finally deciding to flee. The mystery of those actions rapidly dissipates when more familiar histories, easily graspable in Mexico's current context, begin to appear—a group of masked children armed with toy rifles shoot repeatedly at a boy sitting inside a van, reminding us of one of the most common execution methods or 'score settling' techniques employed by the cartels. Despite being veiled by the false innocence of children's games, Aragon's stories document a radical transformation of Oaxaca's imaginary and of its artistic production, moving them away from the mythological pretense of a primordial identity. What Aragon offers us instead is one of the most recent images of the south as it traverses the current phase of capitalist modernisation—a

countryside that signals its own transformation in a terrain where poverty, power and resources are ardently contested.

Without a doubt this is a vision of the countryside marked by social and historical distance. After all, Aragon is a sociological exception — not only is he a young man who has had access to education but he has also participated in the complexly textured thought processes that encompass being trained as an artist. He also represents, as is usually the case with witnesses of a particularly dramatic historical moment, a certain exteriority to the processes he describes in his work. Being *familiar* with a situation, in both senses of the word, does not necessarily mean being immersed in its traps. It involves escaping that historical logic so that you yourself become a testament of a limited alternative in choosing to observe a social phenomenon rather than exemplifying it. Aragon and his family are, in that sense, surviving witnesses.

In his video *Matamoros* (2009), Aragon filmed the trajectory from his small dusty town of Otumba in the southern State of Oaxaca all the way to Mexico's northern border with the United States, following as closely as possible the route taken by Mr Pedro Vazquez Reyes in the 1980s when he transported marijuana in a Volkswagen until he was caught by Mexican anti-narcotics police in the State of Tamaulipas. Vazquez Reyes was jailed for nearly a decade in the Matamoros penitentiary. The film is a travelogue through space and memory that shows both the beauty of the Mexican landscape and the military and police presence in the roads of the country. Following the voiceover narrative of Vazquez Reyes himself, we hear about his failed attempt to get a slice of the profits coming in from illegal trafficking. The work can hardly be accused of glamorising the *narco* lifestyle or of apologising for it. On the contrary, it operates as a different species of moral fable — the main character of the story is caught and beaten by the police and jailed for years far away from his family, hiding under a false identity. Aragon had very personal reasons for producing this complex representation of a criminal saga — Pedro Vazquez Reyes was the pseudonym of his father, who not only managed to survive and then share the experience of his imprisonment, but who was also wise

enough to return to his hometown and separate himself from the gangs.

The radical element of this narrative is the way it exposes memories of the other rather than present the increasingly paranoid point of view of law enforcement that fuels hegemonic discourses. With delicacy, and avoiding *macho* gestures and bravado, Aragon echoes the tragedies and illusions of a peasanthood whose sole hope of social mobility lies in the production and trafficking of drugs. In Aragon's three-channel video installation *La Trampa/The Trap* (2011), the artist surveys the dry landscape of mountain ranges and ravines in his region, framing it through a makeshift landing strip. Halfway through the film, two men sing a *corrido* ballad that commemorates the 1979 massacre of several peasants who were killed by the federal police who discovered them harvesting marijuana. The burnt remains of a plane and the view of vultures and small planes flying over the ravines render the story with a material and contemporary referent that reinforces the centrality of those stories in understanding the current social crisis.

What Aragon's works put forward is an insight into the relationship between family histories and official histories and the way they both resonate and relate once they are articulated as some kind of contemporary myth. What emerges from his actions is, above all, a sense of urgency—the impossibility of understanding an artistic practice without addressing a zone of conflict or the intellectual labyrinths that are generated by it. What Aragon, in his own beautifully sparse, mythical, and poetic way portrays, is the fate of peasanthood in Latin America; the fate of a class whose seemingly redundant economic and social circumstances will not just pass by without the rest of us taking notice. In another video equally devoid of description and anecdotal intent, Aragon reinforces this idea through the representation of a mythological suicide. In *Ley Fuga/Fugitive Law* (2010) (a term that since the late nineteenth century has been used to describe the illegal executions performed by the police and the army when they claim that a prisoner tried to escape), Aragon presents an older man who takes off his shirt and then places it on a small raft that drifts on a stream only to later shoot at it a few times.

Beyond the specific story that the video perhaps contains, the work alludes to the sacrificial wave currently passing through Mexico without a drop of sentimentalism; to the application of a cyclical death wish inscribed on the current era. Aragon's work is the extremely refined product of a broader social tragedy; a muted, discreet, and to a certain extent playful, presentation of a milieu that the artist is familiar enough with to disclose with an extraordinary level of ambivalence. This is the internal chronicle of an extremely important historical drama—one that traces the transformation of the countryside from a site imbued with the utopias of the Revolution to a new concentrated dystopia of the present.

At a time when the global economy increasingly divides the world population into two categories (those who are integrated into the maddening high speed circuit of overproduction and overconsumption, and those who are excluded from having access not only to basic conditions for survival, let alone the allure of consumption and exchange—the nomadic transnational urbanites and the ghosts of the slums), criminality appears as the only possibility, even if self-destructive, for the upward social mobility of the poor. The process of globalisation, inasmuch as it seeks to reduce entire populations to unemployment and dependency in order to offer nomadic capital ample cheap labour with which to colonise and recolonise vast territories, is bound to witness what Achille Mbembe aptly described as 'the creation of *death worlds,* new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*'.[7] In the geography of *necropolitics*—drug dealing, kidnapping, piracy, people trafficking, the enslavement of migrants and as has happened in Mexico recently, the privatisation of mass graves[8]—the quest for excess is connected across social classes, both at the top and bottom, through methods that while different are still intimately connected to the consumerist cravings experienced both in the south and the north. The extreme impoverishment of the peasant populations of the south and the dissolution of their traditional communitarian ways of living produce a new kind of cheap labour that helps construct a living hell. The rapid impoverishment of the countryside, the forced

integration of peasants into the market economy, and the cultural pressures of consumer capitalism have created a distinct marginal social class for whom criminality seems to be the only economically and psychologically rational alternative. As Tijuana feminist theorist Sayak Valencia has rightly argued in her book *Capitalismo Gore*, we must leave behind the idealised notion of the Third World masses of peasants as a necessary force of resistance.[9] On the contrary, the sudden economic changes in the countryside have converted this force into the cradle of a new peasant culture in which misery and humiliation transform traditional *machismo* into a kind of consumerist violence. This leads to a situation where individuals who have been stripped of their ways of life and their dignity join the mafia as a way to restore a threatened masculinity, 'turning the position of parodic subalternity historically assigned to them'.[10] As a consequence, Valencia concludes, 'they search for their dignity and identity affirmation ... through a kamikaze logic. Those subjects will no longer die or kill for a religion or for a political statement but for power and money.'[11] As Valencia rightly suggests, we ought to consider the extreme violence of gore capitalism as an attempt to achieve immediate consumerist satisfaction by means of extermination. This happens within a new subjectivity that understands murder 'as an exchange, extreme violence as a tool for legitimacy, and the torture of bodies as sport and as a very profitable display of power'.[12]

This entire process lurks beneath the dust of memory collected by Aragon's stories. Against the mainstream stereotypes that tend to visualise the changes produced by globalisation in terms of the production of new urban intensities, Aragon makes us aware of the complex instability of the countryside as its borders are put into question by the forces of the present. Thus, the anxiety that one feels in Aragon's installation *Tinieblas* (2009) for which thirteen musicians were filmed on different days playing a funerary march by Guatemalan composer and musician Jose Arce. Standing on one of the *mojoneras* or boundary stones of the Ocotlan town, each musician played the tune with their respective instrument. According to the artist, the work is a reflection on the constant border conflicts that mark the history of his hometown and

the history of different communities in Oaxaca. The image the work creates operates as a symbol of masterful ambivalence. The extraordinary orchestration of this ghostly performance, whose multi-channel experience places the audience in an imaginary centre, is a testament to a refined ambivalence wherein a new cultural dexterity appears in the midst of a maelstrom of old and new social catastrophes. This is, in fact, the condition of the New South, whose inclusion cannot be defined with the language of cultural justice and fair representation, but rather with the terms put forth by the fateful intrusion of the messengers of ethical and social disaster.

III

In the last years, the already politicised artistic practice in Mexico has had to be redefined to absorb a veritable inferno. No matter the occasional attempts to criticise it, the contemporary art scene seems to have found in the current crisis of violence the space for multifarious visual experimentation. What is surprising is the timeliness of the response: few other moments of cultural production in the history of the country have been as intimately related to the temporality of the nation.

Reviewing just a few examples might allow you to see the proliferation of the themes, as well as the variety of artistic modalities involved in the phenomenon. In most cases, we have a situation where a certain set of methodologies have absorbed a new historical situation. Thus the work that for more than a decade Argentinian-Mexican artist Enrique Jezik has been doing with firearms, acquires now a horrible urgency, a historical allegorical function. When he produced a sculpture for his overview at MUAC Museum, he modernised the medium by turning from poor materials to exploring the sculptural possibilities of bulletproof steel. By titling his recent shooting sculpture *Festival of Bullets* (2011), an allusion to a chapter of the famous chronicle of the Mexican Revolution by Martin Luis Guzmán *The Eagle of the Serpent* (1929), he suggested the tension between the materiality of protection and the new form of what at the end of the day is a revolutionary process and a subaltern rebellion. Carlos Aguirre, a key artist who has been working in the field of

text and graphic conceptual art since the 1970s, has recently turned his research to underlying the relation between name and image in the press; for instance, comparing the nicknames of the gangsters in the underworld mafias and the image of their bodies as they are reported in the press when killed. Just recently, artist Carlos Amorales, who has had significant international attention in relation to his complex exploration of graphics, identity and cultural circulation, felt the need to use an artificial unreadable graphic alphabet he has created through different processes of abstraction, to simulate a popular photonovel where corpses borrowed from illustrated publications seem to come back to life in a gothic parallel world.

Young artist Xochitl Munguia has developed a remarkable graphic method to develop images in the street by collecting the dirt from the soles of pedestrians. She printed images of corpses selected from the press, with contact glue transferred into the paper by means of silkscreen. By gluing those potential prints on the floor in a pedestrian street in Mexico city downtown, she confronted the audience with the images of death that are imprinted already in their imaginary. Such a method was both a means to infuse life in graphics, by far the most outmoded of the traditional media, at the same time exploring the unconscious and widely extended relationship in the Mexican imaginary between corpses and trash and dirt, which comes all the way from Luis Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* (1950).

I would not be qualified to dismiss all those actions, objects and images as the expression of a mere wish to fulfil the needs of the international market of cultural stereotypes, for even not being an artist, I was recently carried by the urgency of producing a work. To increase my shame it is a large silkscreen print with a deliberately pretentious title, *Towards an Architecture: a postindustrial anamorphism (Apres Salvador Dali),* signed with artist-theorist Mariana Botey. It shows the effigy of two ziggurat-like towers, one printed in green like the US dollar bill, and the other in the purple ink of the Mexican 500 peso banknote. In presenting this work in an exhibition, without intending to violate the rules of curatorial ethical behaviour, we were arguing that the image of these twin towers was one of the few occasions where the spectre of capital

4   Teresa Margolles
     127 cuerpos, 2006

5   Teresa Margolles
What Else Could We Talk About? Cleaning, 2009

6   Teresa Margolles
What Else Could We Talk About? Recovered Blood, 2009

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could be actually presented, thanks to the collaboration of the criminal gangs and the installation art talents of the Mexican police. The idea is that, after a while, you are able to notice that these towers are a paranoiac critical image coming from a famous press photograph about the biggest seizure of cash in history: the more than $us205 million confiscated from the Chinese businessman Zhenli Ye Gong in his office in Mexico City in March 2007. I rotated this ninety degrees to one side to reveal a hidden secondary image, very much like Dali did in 1927 in a famous contribution to 'Surrealism at the Service of the Revolution'.

Should we dismiss all these forms of cultural practice and public mirages and hallucinations, as purely opportunistic, in terms of creating a social imaginary able to grasp the span of attention of the market or the international art world, without any specific political value? I would entirely disagree. They come, in fact, from the potential criticality of the 'we' inscribed by the nation, which forces us to belong to a certain geography of discourses, and thus also sets up the space where criticality is bound to take place, at least while we do not produce a proper postnational sphere to redirect the need of building a certain kind of social and political agency. But I will argue this from within the story of a title.

IV: A title

In 2009 I was commissioned to curate Teresa Margolles's *What Else Could We Talk About?* intervention for the Mexican Pavillion in the Venice biennale. The process leading to the project was all but simple and straightforward. I was surprised that sometime in the middle of December 2008, just before the Christmas holidays, a letter from the Mexican Foreign Affairs Ministry arrived inviting me, with another seven curators, to make proposals for an exhibition including one or several artists, to be chosen by a panel of colleagues and museum directors. The method meant a significant institutional advance. For the first time an official event of cultural exportation, which had all through the twentieth century had been defined by the ideological agenda of the powers that be, could be up for grabs for a critical intervention. I would argue that the method alone created a field of immanancy.

I immediately set on the artist that I would want to work if chosen: Teresa Margolles. By the end of 2008 Margolles was still relatively marginal in the global art circuit. She had been working for two decades in relation to human remains, both as member of the Semefo (the Medical Forensic Service) collective in the early 1990s and as a soloist. Yet, she and the fearsome thematic and materiality of her work made it hard for curators and institutions to take her on board. Beyond such issues, what made her a self-evident choice was a specific political turn in her daunting poetics. From 2007 onwards, Margolles had abandoned her idiosyncratic atelier in the official mortuaries of Mexico to explore the pervasive presence of death in the urban and social landscape. (Figure 4) This had, evidently, been over-determined by circumstances: her gothic aesthetic had been forced to address a crisis of overproduction. In our exchange of ideas via email in the winter of 2008 (we were in fact located at the opposite sides of the Mediterranean Sea, she in Madrid and I in Beirut) Teresa described in her own words the plight she felt it was necessary to address:

> I am interested in talking about what is happening in the State of Sinaloa. There are 1120 dead this year and December is not finished ... each month the figure is bigger than the previous month ... These are 1120 people, mostly youngsters, who do not exist anymore and, corny as it may sound, will not be with their families on Christmas. There will be only empty chairs, and their memory that in these cases becomes vendetta. To revenge the brother, cousin, the friend or one's own son ... I am also working about the sense of blood ... On who is cleaning the blood from the street, and about the hundreds of score settling shootings, shot bodies... with clothes impregnated with blood, not any longer in the morgue during necropsy, but blood directly retrieved from the floor where, once the corpse is taken, it stays like a trace, as a last refuge. I do not need any longer to go to the morgue because the bodies are lying in the street.

This was, indeed, a situation where the heterotopic had become topical, bringing an underground cultural practice

to produce its necrology in broad light. The project Margolles and I arrived at by the first days of 2009 involved employing strategies of low materiality exportation to explore the way violence has inundated the streets of cities in the north of Mexico with corpses. At this time it was still possible for the government to pretend that the violence crisis affected only members of the criminal gangs, adhering to the indifference with which mainstream society stares at the extermination of those who, well beforehand, had implicitly been deemed disposable. By 8 January 2009, we had finished the project but we were still lacking a title for the show. Fortune is an ironical goddess, as you may well know. I had just landed back in Mexico City, when Teresa called me over the phone urging me to check *La Jornada* newspaper. In the first page one could read the following item:

> *The Diplomatic staff ought to point out that there is no chaos: Calderón*
>
> Claudia Herrera Beltrán
>
> President Felipe Calderón instructed ambassadors and consuls to spread out the reality of the country, because it is not true that the 'civil population is being massacred in the streets' of Mexico and that chaos prevails.
>
> He admitted the number of casualties was surprising and worrying, but claimed they are indissolubly bound to the battles of criminal groups for territories they are losing, and related to the weakening of their structures. Therefore, he recommended them to claim proudly that the country lives a moment of institutional recomposing and that it enjoys democratic stability.

I was taken aback. In other days when a Mexican president would dictate an ideological line ('*dar línea*') in such an emotional way, they would at least abide by the unwritten good manners rule of keeping everything in the dark and instructing his employers to stay away from the view of journalists. I grabbed the phone, called the artist, and told her in a rather defeatist tone:

'Look, Teresa: the president is instructing the ambassadors to silence the information about violence in the country, so it is unlikely that a project like the one we just made will be chosen. My gut feeling is that we should simply radicalise the project knowing that we will be working for the archive files, and just try to produce the show locally. I mean that we would at least leave the idea in the record.'

Angry on the other side of the line, I heard Teresa saying:

'No way: what do they think they are. *What else could we talk about?*'

I stopped her:

'Tere: that's it. There you have the title: "What else could we talk about?"'

I believe this story may help illuminate the way contemporary art in places like Mexico is frequently entangled in a programmatic or unconscious symbolic battle with the discourses of power. The coming together of different agendas is bound to produce friction and disagreement. In Margolles's interjection one can attest to the way a number of contemporary artists involve their work in a certain intervention of the sphere of public representations and words. Despite the erosion of the role of the public intellectual under global capitalism, artists like Margolles, in precisely not considering themselves as 'political' practitioners, assume a wider role in strategically conducting their material and symbolical practices as an intervention in relation to the very fabric of the public sphere. The questioning of what is meant to appear and be perceived, of which lives and deaths are considered a matter of concern, on which forms of living and dying are meant to be conceived by the common sense. In fact, this title encodes, in my view, the betraying theory of the current artistic situation: the impossibility of limiting this speech, at the same time one has to confess the burden involved in carrying it. And the unavoidable political conflict springing from the impossible goal of an administration that unwisely believes that both the

social situation, and the discourses emerging around it, are to be contained for the sake of the image of the nation within the field of representations that constitute the global imaginary.

This instability of images is very much at the core of the case. To the distaste of government officials, by 2008 global news agencies had started to report on the uncontrollable violence. They had been particularly offended when back in March 2008 one of the darkest American intelligence think-thanks, STRATFORD, which by the way has recently been at the centre of a significant Wikileaks exposure, warned that Mexico, with Afghanistan, was in danger of collapsing into anarchy, claiming that it was nearing the status of a 'failed state'. Such a claim, misinterpreted by the press and the political class as if it were coming from the American military and intelligence agencies, left a painful scar on the forehead of an elite entirely convinced that such an international image has effects not only in terms of political stability but also in relation to the country's suitability for tourism and foreign investment.

The geography of images is that important. The great obsession of the neoliberal elites around the world is, indeed, the way the behaviour of markets and polls seem to be inextricably bound to the volatility of images and expectations. This is to say that, in a twisted version of what in physics we call the Heisenberg principle, the way the south is perceived by the north appears as creating the south, defining both its markets and its self-representation, to a point that, as has also occurred with the Greek financial crisis, overrules any principle of democratic management or any concept of sovereignty.

In turn, Margolles's show was a careful negotiation of theatrical expectations, political allusions, carefully staged silences and trust in the emotional and conceptual significance of intimacy with base materiality. A great deal of the effect of the exhibition involved the different ways the artist enacted a ghostly materialisation of the uncanny presence of the bodies of the dead. Margolles's first decision was to absorb the dirt and ruin of the Rota Ivancich by refusing to clean or restore the rooms of the sixteenth-century Venetian palace selected as the venue for the Mexican Pavilion. She was intending to absorb the dust and residue of the place, and mix it with the

import of contemporary dead matter. Secondly, there was the dutiful production of a number of rules devised to create decorum for a process of mourning. No parties were allowed in the pavilion; furthermore, artist and curator, and any other person, were strictly prohibited from guiding tours or individuals into the building. The work was meant to operate as a matter of direct experience, rather than being framed as a statement of intent. All interaction with the site and works was to be trusted to the discreet labels providing the minimum information to trigger the experience. The work, properly speaking, was to take place as a matter of resonances and contaminations, both at the level of the metonymic contact of the bodies of the dead and the living, and the imaginary geography produced by the geographical transference of the gothic spatiality of dying.

I will only sketch the workings of the two main projects of the exhibition. After walking through a number of empty rooms, the audience would encounter a quiet action or evidence of it in the guise of moisture on the floor. Performers, some of them in fact activists from the Mexican border in the north, who knew from direct experience the tragedy of their cities, were meant to quietly and ceremonially mop the floor, leaving a minimum trace of water. After a few rooms, the audience would encounter a text on the wall explaining the peculiarities of the rite. At least once a day, for the duration of the biennial, the floors were mopped with water containing a minimum quantity of blood from people killed in the north of Mexico. (Figures 5 & 6) Through the six months of the exhibition, this ghostly matter was meant to impregnate the building and also, in minimum traces, the shoes of the audience. Margolles invoked the presence of people killed by means of a small quantity of their body fluids, carried by water, mud and clothes, those materials gathered from the floors where killings had been performed. Dirt with dirt, matter with matter, dust against dust and water and mud, all those combinations and permutations were to both invoke a response from the viewers and document the condition of an impossible geography of the present. In that sense the exhibition appears as a summary of the strategies of the undercover exportation of dead materiality with which Margolles, in recent years, has

devolved to the privileged north (geographically speaking as well as socially and economically) the deadly costs of their exploits. Such microscopic, invisible and symbolic exchange was furthermore underlined by a critical gesture. As you may know, it is a tradition of the biennial to raise the flag of the country of each pavillion next to that of the European Union and the emblem of Venice. The gesture, which again involved enormously complex negotiation and conflict, replaced the Mexican flag with a blood soaked piece of cloth. The emblem of a death territory, the signature of a geography of neocapitalism.

As I have told you, the title of the Mexican Pavilion of 2009 encoded a retort to the administration's intention to deny such transmogrification of the national geography. When Margolles and I were selected, all hell broke loose behind closed doors. Alerted about the presidential orders, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs requested some time, which was employed by one of the candidates to use her ministerial connections to have the decision changed. It took two weeks at least until the officials from the Fine Arts Institute convinced Foreign Affairs that the costs of censoring the work would be much more damaging than letting it happen. A wise bureaucracy, indeed, would have tried to cash in on the democratic gesture of absorbing it. It did not work that way. If you check the material published at the time of the biennial, the logo of the Mexican Foreign Affairs Ministry disappeared, along with that of the Jumex collection. Both withdrew in silence, with an absolute disdain for the commitments they had taken in public. By time of the biennale there was literally no Mexican officially present to represent the government in the Pavillion, not even the cultural attaché to Italy. Margolles's exhibition went on as representation without representation, as an official pavillion with no official representatives.

Now that Felipe Calderon's administration is over, I finally feel free to say that Margolles's project caused a number of internal casualties: one of the members of the jury, the Tamayo Museum director, Ramiro Martinez, had to step down from his post because the pressure from one of the losing candidates made his position untenable. Similarly, the head of the cultural section of the Foreign Affairs Ministry, Alberto Fierro,

who had initiated the project, was quietly removed from his post and be transferred to a Mexican consulate in Florida, which seemingly is the equivalent of Siberia for the Mexican foreign service. All attempts to stage the action back in Mexico City, first in a the Carrillo Gil Museum, and then in 'Crisisss', an exhibition by Gerardo Mosquera in the Fine Arts Palace of Mexico City, were aborted in fear of infuriating the higher authorities. Totally independent projects related to tracing the social and cultural effects of drug dealing in culture became suddenly dangerous for the art institutions, that feared that they would wake up the spectre of the Venice Biennial. But all those costs were worth it. They come to suggest that, differently from what many critical arguments seem to believe, art remains political because all the time, even unconsciously, we are responsible, as much as the elite and the media apparatus that communicates propaganda, for the representations that build the hegemony. In essence, our means and mute methods are not as devoid of power and significance as they intend us to believe. All that is to be understood once one does not escape from the condition of art-making in the south, which involves accepting a certain complicated negotiation with the historical situation that is imposed on us. Because we are constituted by the imaginary community of a 'we'. The 'we' that is stated when we say things like '*What else could we talk about?*'

V: Outburst

Do not expect, however, that the efforts of activating a political space of artistic interventions in the south will be devoid of paradoxes and conflict. One of the main difficulties we have is incorporating this different geography of the political into something like a common front, which arises from the impossibility of a multiculturalist administrative policy that could also address the specific and sporadic outburst of a southern political aesthetic. Just last week Teresa Margolles's show at the Dowse Art Museum in Lower Hult, New Zeland, which was going to include her action *So it vanishes,* consisting of the emission of soap bubbles made with a small proportion of water used to clean corpses of people who had died in violent circumstances, was cancelled because of objections raised

by the Maori. According to the press, local Iwi in Lower Hult argued that Margolles's work with fluids from dead bodies was 'equivalent to inviting death or calamity'. Within such a narrative, of course, it would be logical to jump to the conclusion that, after all, maybe the work of artists such as Margolles in Mexico are to be blamed for the current social situation. We ought to give Maori the benefit of the doubt. Inasmuch as works like these involve, in their methodologies, the figure of the nomadism of the current geographies of capitalism, and they suggest the impossibility of containing the geographies of death in their apparent point of origin, indeed, the arrival of works like Margolles's could mean that the spaces of calamity will not just remain over there.

Notes

1   G. Saldierna and K. Avilés, 'Con un mural en la frontera, Calderón exige a EU detener el tráfico de armas', La Jornada, 17 de Febrero 2012 <http://www.jornada. unam.mx/2012/02/17/politica/013n2pol>.

2   Líbera, an Italian human rights organisation, reported in December 2012 that the actual death toll of the 'invisible and absurd war' on drugs by President Calderón's administration is 136,100 people, a number well above any casualty of a war in recent times around the world. A. Méndez, 'Documentan más de 136 mil muertes por lucha al narco; "más que un país en guerra", La Jornada, 11 December 2012 <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2012/12/11/politica/015n1pol>.

3   Comité Invisible Jaltenco, 'La estética relacional del calderonato: pedagogía condescendiente', 23 February 2012 <http://comiteinvisiblejaltenco.blogspot. mx/2012/02/el-calderonismo-como-estetica.html>.

4   Ibid.

5   P. Reyes, Palas por Pistolas Manifesto <http://www.palasporpistolas. org/?page_id=162>. For an account of this work by the artist see <http:// pedroreyes.net/palasporpistolas.php>. For a presentation on the different actions and exhibitions Reyes has produced on the basis of the shovels, see <http://www. palasporpistolas.org/>.

6   See <http://www.santiago-sierra.com/200704_1024.php>.

7   A. Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', Public Culture 15, no. 1 (2003): 40.

8   In August 2012 the corpses of 72 Central American immigrants were found in a mass grave in the municipality of San Fernando in the Mexican State of Tamaulipas. According to one of the survivors of the massacre, the immigrants, who had been kidnapped from cars that were taking them north toward the US border, were killed because they could not pay their ransom and because they resisted joining the Zeta paramilitary group. Jesús Aranda, 'Zetas ejecutaron por la espalda a 72 migrantes', La Jornada, 26 August 2010 <http:// www.jornada.unam.mx/2010/08/26/index.php?section=politica&article=00) 2n1pol>. Since then it has become common for mass graves to be discovered throughout the country while numbers of missing people has increased rapidly, to, according to the National Commission of Human Rights, more than 24,000. See Olga Rodríguez, 'Unidentified bodies, missing cases mount

in Mexico,' Associated Press, 23 July 2011 <http://bigstory.ap.org/article/unidentified-bodies-missing-cases-mount-mexico>.

9   S. Valencia, *Capitalismo Gore* (Madrid: Melusina, 2010).

10 Ibid., 81.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 85. Similarly, we ought to interpret the military deploment of Felipe Calderon's administration (2006–2012) as a failed attempt to repair lost male authority.

With Salvage and Knife Tongue

Postcommodity[1,2]

1

> my
> up
> side
> down
> home
> faces
> east [3] [4]

i made it that way [5]
when i became its hostage [6] [7]
(with salvage

and knife tongue [8]

it reminds people [9]
what is possible [10] [11]

if you
work
hard

and abandon reason [12] [13]

7   Postcommodity
      With Salvage and Knife Tongue, 2011-2012

2

i often ask my children
to remember

> words
> attached
> to water [14]

> we once
> passed
> through [15]

> the way earth
> filters light [16] [17]

> and
> our
> being [18] [19]

the way tools

> are used [20]

> to bend [21] [22]

> circum
> stance [23] [24]

3

if you ever thought

you would hear music [25]
at this point

a drum

a trumpet [26]

or some
thing [27]

it never happens
in public [28]

night simply
appears
and falls
away

the market
closes and opens [29] [30]

a new referendum [31]
becomes
law [32]

Notes

1   For the Adelaide Festival 2010, the American indigenous art collective Postcommodity developed the work *With Salvage and Knife Tongue* as a way of exploring the potential commonalities between North American and Australian indigenous peoples in terms of worldview and experiences with colonisation. In particular, the work highlighted indigenous cultural appropriations of English language dialects as tools of self-determination during a time when the world's majority of indigenous languages are disappearing at an unprecedented rate.

2   This phonemic inquiry contributes to a work of art that both linguistically underscores intercultural differences while also making concrete a unifying connection between the Cherokee and Pitjantjatjara — two indigenous groups separated by the Pacific, yet who have both survived British colonisation and removal from their ancestral homelands.

3   With only one of us having visited Australia before, our comprehension of the vastness of the land was severely skewed. We grew up in schools where we were taught to study maps that are flattest when the United States is in the centre, allowing our home country to stretch to its maximum size, relegating other lands to confined corners. Upon our arrival we began, on an experiential level, to grasp the immensity of Australia and, with this humbling sense of place, we began to learn more about the monumental number of indigenous languages, which are spoken by hundreds of Aboriginal groups covering an area larger than Texas twelve times over.

4   The immersive installation environment features a semicircle of four large video projection screens showcasing computationally generative combinations of four American and/or Australian indigenous people articulating lines of an indigenous empathetic poem — about the displacement of people (which is about getting kicked out of or forcibly removed from your home) resulting from the early twenty-first-century global economic meltdown. These four projections feature varying combinations of actors and lines of poetry emerging into endless patterns of symmetry and asymmetry. (Figure 7) All possible combinations of variables, which include gender, age group, ethnicity and poetic line, are generated using a probability model that changes over time.

5   To achieve this, the piece simultaneously synthesises and contrasts Cherokee and Pitjantjatjara uses of English by visually and sonically underscoring the linguistic phonetic features forming their English language accents.

6   Literacies such as reading, writing and digital media are not going away — it's time to reimagine these literacies through our own worldviews.

7   *With Salvage and Knife Tongue* demonstrates the indigenous adaptive reuse of the English language as a means of survival in the face of subjugating and historically violent forces.

8   When given only the coloniser's tools, an American Indian might find himself or herself ill-equipped to understand an indigenous people from a polar-opposite land. Making one feel as they know very little when in actuality middlemen can be eliminated.

9   One of the most striking aspects of learning that took place during these dialogues was Postcommodity's realisation that English as a mode of communication was not fluid between itself as a collective and its Australian Aboriginal collaborators. This realisation by Postcommodity was counter to its assumptions of what it would encounter. In other words, the Pitjantjatjara family consisted of people who were native language speakers of their indigenous language, whereas the members of Postcommodity were native language speakers of English. We began to think about how this contrast is influenced by differing timelines associated with colonisation. Through the shared struggle between

Postcommodity and its Pitjantjatjara collaborators to use English as a common language, the art collective was reminded that American Indigenous peoples have been experiencing and rationalising the violent velocities of colonisation for over five hundred and twenty years. As the collective put America's history in context with the differing colonisation timeline of Australia (over two hundred and forty years in the making), it began to experience many faces of colonisation, not only across cultures, but across time as well.

10   The following is an example that includes the variable of ethnicity as part of the composition. One of these outcomes includes a scenario where two elder Cherokee men and two younger Pitjantjatjara men each individually and simultaneously articulate a differing line, thus resulting in a cacophony of speech, whereas at other times one might witness a younger Cherokee woman, a younger Pitjantjatjara man, an elder Cherokee man, and an elder Pitjantjatjara woman all articulating a chorus of the same line all at once.

11   As the two groups learned how to communicate more fluidly with each other, Postcommodity became aware of what appeared to be a negation between hemispheres of cultural self-determination. This became apparent as the collective observed that North American indigenous groups exercise notions of sovereignty as its people's languages are disappearing, while at the same time, on a different continent, its Pitjantjatjara collaborators did not understand or exercise ideas of sovereignty, yet their language was spoken strongly across generations.

12   Postcommodity's intentions for mediating this intercultural, multilinguistic and intergenerational complexity across gender are driven by its trickster ethos, characterised by a likeliness to problematise cultural models about humanity often oversimplified by mass media while made concrete by the status quo.

13   Postcommodity's generative algorithm created for *With Salvage and Knife Tongue* leads to various line-by-line outcomes that, for example, project a scenario where all the people featured at a given moment may all articulate the same line of the poem, while at other times differing combinations of poetic lines emerge revealing other results. With all possible variables considered, *With Salvage and Knife Tongue* produces hundreds of outcomes. Mixing the previously mentioned variables leads to patterns such as two young women articulating the same line while two elder women articulate a different line all in simultaneity.

14   There is a clear manipulation of diction, structural grammar, syntax, subject/object/verb relationships, context, meaning, and historical/political/social/cultural references dispersed among the broken lines and stanzas. It was challenging conceptually, and challenging to read. Any hack job of the English language renders numerous challenges; one is always readability because the issue of readability is in the mind of the person or people hacking the language. The poem cut the issues by positioning a set of metaphors intrinsic to literal and abstract constructs of indigenous/coloniser power and political structures, as well as contemporary indigenous experience and world view. The poem also ensured Postcommodity's role as collaborators off-camera. In this regard, the words provided the conceptual and aesthetic landscape for our collaboration, as well as the primary mediating force of dialogue and intercultural exchange. In terms of cutting the issues, the poem forced people to consciously, or unconsciously, question their own relationship and awareness of language usage, cultural self-determination and sovereignty. The people who were most capable of reciting the poem had the strongest command of English and the greatest capacity to manipulate the language, as well as the meaning being conveyed. In this regard, they had the greatest capacity to utilise English as a weapon, or as a code of cultural self-determination and sovereignty. This points to the fact that their relationship with concepts of cultural self-determination and sovereignty are

more universally codified and self-aware, rather than more experiential or purely experiential. Inversely, their relationships with the economy and the global market forces of colonisation are more experiential and less consciously aware. The people who read most clearly are most integrated into the economy through formal mechanisms. With this in mind, the folks who had the most difficulty reading the lines of the poem have the least interest in the English language, as a code of self-determination, or in general, for daily usage. Clearly, a few people had very little knowledge of the English language. These people are the least integrated into the economy and global market through formal mechanisms. They exist, in large part, outside the global market. Equally important, their relationship with cultural self-determination and sovereignty is not necessarily codified, but, rather, it is far more experiential and less self-consciously aware. These concepts are hugely important to the success of the piece.

15   This temporal nature of Postcommodity's generative model allows the collective to approximate the work's rhetorical and aesthetic structure as it randomly unfolds over the course of time.

16   It is an idea that provided the opportunity for dialogue between indigenous groups that could only take place between two groups in colocated ceremonial space.

17   Postcommodity positioned its invitation to exhibit at the Adelaide Festival, and the curatorial support of Victoria Lynn, to create a new work largely based upon the collective's assumptions regarding experiences that Native Americans and Australian Aboriginal peoples might have in common with each other. These assumptions were artistically expressed by Postcommodity to create a cross-cultural place for an intercontinental indigenous dialogue. This twenty-first-century intercontinental indigenous gathering resulted in knowledge exchange dialogues between Postcommodity, members of the Cherokee Nation, and family members from a Pitjantjatjara community located not far from Adelaide, Australia.

18   These types of meaning-making dialogues cannot take place within the virtual world of the market's global village.

19   in--jiyanv?i—I put (into a container) something living (living) (remote past) Onita Lynch, Laura Anderson, Bobby Blossom, *Igajeli Yonega-Jalagi Didelogwasdodi* (English to Cherokee Dictionary) (Onita Lynch, 1996), 188.

20   There may be times when in simultaneity a Pitjantjatjara elder and youth (perhaps differing genders or the same gender) together recite one line, while a Cherokee elder and youth (perhaps differing genders or the same gender) together recite a different line. Another example includes a scenario where differing lines map to Cherokee and Pitjantjatjara elders in contrast to Cherokee and Pitjantjatjara youth. Through Postcommodity's generative computational algorithms, these and all possible patterns eventually emerge over time.

21   In their effort to provoke the systematic complexity of intercultural ceremony, Postcommodity created a generative and immersive computational video installation environment complete with spatially projected audio. *With Salvage and Knife Tongue* is a generative synthesis of varying Indigenous experiences of colonisation geographically—as northern and southern hemispheres, American and Australian and, sonically, as individuals representing unique cultures, and ethnicities.

22   Postcommodity's intentions for mediating this intercultural, multilinguistic, and intergenerational complexity across gender are driven by its trickster ethos, characterised by a likeliness to problematise cultural models about humanity often oversimplified by mass media while made concrete by the status quo.

23   Despite the discontinuity of language between the two groups, a few days of relationship building eventually led to the development of both parties' ability

to efficiently adapt by using salvaged pieces and parts of language to render communication fluid and comfortable.

24   Despite the differences between many North American and Australian indigenous peoples thus far highlighted, there are strong similarities. Australian Aboriginal and American indigenous groups were removed from their ancestral geographic ecologies, but continue to live on today. Throughout the history of America and Australia, schooling was used and continues to be used by the coloniser as a way to discipline the American and Australian indigenous peoples to swallow coloniser dreams, such as the American dream, or perhaps an Australian dream if there is such a thing.

25   As choirs of poetic lines are visually and sonically displayed, speech is analysed in real time by applying synthesis and re-synthesis techniques of sound using audio convolution and morphing algorithms. These audio techniques allow the characteristics of speakers' voices to influence each other, yielding the similarities and differences between their vocal expressions, which often result in the creation of new voices of shared experience. These new synthesised voices are projected from the rear of the gallery at the same time that the unaffected voices emanate from the respective video screens that given individuals are projected on at a given moment, so if person B is projected on screen one, then a visitor will hear person B's voice emanating from screen one.

26   Postcommodity's work, *With Salvage and Knife Tongue,* is a linguistic phonemic examination of how indigenous groups in the United States and Australia have appropriated colonial English as a means of rationalising and representing their respective cultural and political identities within the contexts of colonisation, imperialism, neoliberalism, globalisation, and nation-states.

27   *With Salvage and Knife Tongue* reveals the following questions by Postcommodity: How are we (indigenous peoples from America and Australia) using the English language to represent our indigenous worldviews? How do we use this language as tool to construct some kind of an existence when our futures are about being in debt or in poverty? How do we use the English language as indigenous peoples to build new intercontinental networks with each other?

28   Aspects of these dialogues focused upon the historical and contemporary impacts of colonisation and globalisation stemming from the experiences of the members of Postcommodity, the Pitjantjatjara family and members of the Cherokee Nation. Through processes of dialogue, Postcommodity assembled an international community of collaborators to create content for their place-based work exhibited in Adelaide. Throughout these intercultural dialogues, Postcommodity learned much about the naivety of its assumptions, as well as aspects of its assumptions that were correct.

29   Today these groups continue to endure the exterior forces of the neoliberal global market with a strong resolve for self-determination.

30   Nowhere did capitalism penetrate more rapidly or dramatically then the Trans-Mississippi West, whose 'vast, trackless spaces' (as Walt Whitman called them) were now absorbed into the expanding economy. At the close of the Civil War, the frontier of settlement did not extend far beyond the Mississippi River. To the west lay millions of acres of fertile and mineral-rich land roamed by immense buffalo herds that provided food, clothing and shelter for a population of perhaps a quarter of a million Indians, many of them eastern tribes forced inland two centuries before from the East Coast, and moved again earlier in the nineteenth century to open the Old Northwest and Southwest to white farmers and planters. Although Indian policy provoked much controversy during the Grant years, nearly all military and civilian officials shared a common assumption: that the federal government should persuade or coerce the Plains Indians to exchange

their religion, communal form of property and 'nomadic' way of life for Christian worship and settled agriculture on federally supervised reservations. In a word, they would surrender most of their land and cease to be Indians. E. Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863–1877* (New York: Harper Collins, 1988), 462.

31 In contrast to the experiences of its Pitjantjatjara collaborators, the members of Postcommodity reflected upon their home while in Adelaide and concluded that because concepts of sovereignty have been acknowledged by indigenous communities throughout North America, these groups have been left with little choice but to engage self-determination through concepts of sovereignty. This understanding raised numerous questions regarding whether or not sovereignty is, in fact, the most appropriate framework for nation building and exerting self-determination.

32 To Postcommodity it was evident that the Pitjantjatjara exercised self-determination by doing what they do as a people, by simply being who they are as Pitjantjatjara. At the same time, unlike the Cherokee, the Pitjantjatjara have no federal trust relationship or treaty relationship with the government of Australia, thus making them extremely vulnerable to the whims, desires, and values of the Australian nation and the global economy. North American indigenous experiences suggest that this may only develop toward greater disadvantages for Australian Aboriginal peoples with the passage of time.

Australians

Callum Morton

In a talk in Chicago a few years ago the Italian-born Francesco Bonami, curator of the 2010 Whitney Biennial, Manifesta 3 and the 50th Venice Biennale, noted 'all Australian art is bad'.

His argument was a little incoherent, mainly, I think, because he was trying unsuccessfully to be a bit funny for his young university audience, but his point was that Australian Art (which incidentally he says is even worse than Canadian Art, so I have both covered),[1] tries too hard to display its regionalism on the surface of the work and it is *bad* because, to him, all art is the same now no matter where it comes from. He simply does not consider difference in these terms. He is interested in work that opens up new possibilities in other terrains and, in his words, if you can figure out where an artwork comes from 'from very far away' then it is 'bad'.

Needless to say the argument can easily be unpacked, particularly when it has come from a curator who has influence in the trans-Atlantic epicentres and is patronised by Francois Pinault and other forces of the powerful private sphere. (He curated 'Italics: Italian Art between Tradition and Revolution, 1968–2008' at Palazzo Grassi).

Bonami can comfortably *not* negotiate our particular sense of place. He has never been to Australia, nor would he feel the need to come. The Venice Biennale, he says, could be curated online (I would quite like to see this). Certainly he would not feel the need to convene a forum on a subject such as the local and the global.

But let's just look at little closer at the type of 'badness' he is referring to here because part of me thinks it might well be an Australian tendency to interrogate and celebrate all forms of badness. We often hear a show or a work described as *Good*

8   Callum Morton
     Down the Hatch, 2003

9   Callum Morton
In the Pines, 2008

10   Callum Morton
Grotto (exterior day), 2009

Bad or *Bad Bad* as a qualification of its character. *Good Bad* tends to be either:

> A. When someone is self consciously trying to do something badly in these terms (draw 'badly' for instance or choose a subject that is bad, unpopular or kitsch, in an effort to destabilise good taste or rediscover a playfulness in the work); or

> B. When someone tries very hard to be good but gets it so wrong that it takes on another, stranger character altogether. I think here of early colonial paintings, naïve or outsider art and so on.

Bad Bad on the other hand is when someone is trying to mimic 'good' work in Bonami's terms and achieves it so completely that they manage to erase all the interest from the work. *Bad Bad* ignores the logic of the local. One thing is certain — Bonami's perception of our *Badness* isn't very good, it's much richer than that.

Around the same time the curator of the 2008 Sydney Biennale and the most recent Documenta, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, related to me at a dinner that she had taken the eminent continental philosopher Giorgio Agamben to my work *Valhalla* in Venice and that his one word response was simply, and without any indication of inflection from her: 'Australians.' I asked what this meant and she simply shrugged.

It was surprising and confusing if not a little cruel of her to say this. From what little I have read and for that matter understood of Agamben I enjoy the dialectical poetics of his work and ideas. Sure a lot of it falls out as soon as it goes in — I am after all not a philosopher — but I do grasp a few things; for instance, the drive to rediscover the profane from the grip of the sacred (in capitalism) and in many ways I think that artists (particularly from here) are often engaged in a play with received ideas and forms that have the aura of the sacred swimming about them.

Indeed for some of my work I rather self-consciously devised a system for playing with and resisting the global (read

sacred) image submerging my practice. This involved impos-
ing a series of filters that frame the process of production, a
flow chart that sets out a variety of oppositional contexts in
dialectical interplay—the public and the private, the local and
the global, the real and the model (simulation) and, yes, the
good and the bad. It is quasi-rational but is attentive to the
irrational, the trivial, the perverse and the chaotic in its orbit.
It is in essence a dumb research model to assist in attaining
a more specific object or atmosphere, one that is specific to
my place in the world. This method always takes into account
where the work will be shown and places it alongside where it
has come from.

But I have never been interested in finding a place between
these oppositions so much as in rendering indiscernible the
differences between them; that is, to sustain the conflict and
irresolution, to negotiate the paradoxes if you like. This is
why the non-place (similar to the one at the core of *Valhalla*)
remains important to me because it is a paradoxical space that
is neither public nor private but retains elements of both.

Down the Hatch

Down the Hatch (Figure 8) was a work made for a group exhibi-
tion of contemporary Australian art called 'Face Up' at the
Hamburger Bahnhoff in Berlin in 2005.

The surface of the work could be described as a negative
tourist image of Australia, the 'bad' or should I say 'SuperBad'
aspect of the country. At first glance, and in this context, it
reads as a sign of *Australiannes*s, and refers directly to the
content of the show, acting as a type of advertisement.

It could also be read as a reiteration of familiar institu-
tional critiques, in particular the notion of the museum as a
mausoleum, something that swallows life by, in Agamben's
terms, rendering all things outmoded and 'useless'. In this
sense the work literally eats you and spits you out at the end.

But Agamben quite rightly goes further in lamenting
the *museification* of the world by the religion of capitalism,
through its primary industry, tourism.

This gesture that negotiates the seepage of the museologi-
cal frame into our everyday lives is one I have repeated in a
number of works, including those following.

11   Callum Morton
      Grotto (exterior night), 2009

12   Callum Morton
      Grotto (interior), 2009

13   Callum Morton
      Monument #26: Settlement, 2010

14   Callum Morton
      Vic Hislop Museum Hervey Bay, 2002

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In the Pines (2008) (Figure 9), for the Tarrawarra Biennial, changed the function of the museum to a funeral parlour.

Grotto (2009) (Figures 10–12), a Miesean glass container, inside which is a rocky crypt that functions as a bar and café in Tilburg in the Netherlands (the spectator, who is simultaneously the patron, descends into the bar from the geometric to the organic plane).

Monument #26: Settlement (Figure 13), a provisional shelter rendered solid as a type of sarcophagus in a corner of the gallery.

Back to *Down the Hatch*

But underneath the generic surface of the shark heads was in fact a very specific object. In 2004 I had holidayed at Fraser Island in Queensland with my family and visited Hervey Bay, home to Vic Hislop's Great White Shark Exhibition, a private museum dedicated to the exploits of one man and his war with sharks (Figure 14).

Imaged as a type of Captain Ahab or indeed the paranoiac Sam Quint from the film *Jaws* (1975), Vic in his heady days used to set off in a 16-foot dinghy with a shotgun and chains on board and drag back white pointers and tiger sharks, either for money or simply to rid the planet of this beast. Compared to the 'good' Steve Irwin, 'The Crocodile Hunter', whose emphasis always remained ecological and protective (though the spectacle of his exploits was similarly privileged), Hislop represents a 'bad', gnarlier version, a type of *Wolf Creek* on water.

This shark head is the entrance to his museum. So I sutured a 'featuristic' (in Robin Boyd's terms) fragment copied from a private museum in a small Australian town that survives exclusively on tourism, onto the surface of a public one in Berlin for a show that linked the artists together under the rubric of cultural tourism.

Incidentally it emerged a few years ago that Hislop was the one supplying tiger sharks to Damien Hirst for the editioned versions of *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* and when he learnt the price the work sold for was wont to say, 'Shit, I threw in the last tiger shark for free!'

Valhalla

Valhalla (Figures 15 & 16) was a work made as part of the Australian represenation for the 52nd Venice Biennale. It is a three-quarter scale replica of the family home that my architect father designed in the 1970s in Australia, which was destroyed by developers in 2006 and replaced, ironically, with another version of the modernist home, what one might call 'developer modern'. So I brought the house back from the dead as it were and reconstructed it on the other side of the world on an old Armenian soccer pitch. Only it didn't return as it was but rather, as the dead tend to do, a bit rotten, torched and shot through with holes. It was as if it had been dragged through a portal that saw it reappear as a media image, removed from any emotional attachment I might have had to it.

The interior of the work (Figure 17) was a corporate foyer with three lifts that shuttle up and down and can be called with the push of a button. They arrive but never open. In the photo there is a type of gatekeeper who doesn't acknowledge anyone's presence and goes about their business in silence.

Here again I was rendering a private space (my own) as a public one but cast as a type of negative theme park ride where nothing really happens. Indeed the non-place at the heart of *Valhalla* is a 'limbo' space or 'space of judgement'. Agamben refers to this as a space of 'non-meaning' which precisely describes the emptiness of this lobby space for the spectator waiting for the doors to open or, in fact, anything to happen at all.

I was also interested here in the traffic of cultural forms, in this case in International-style architecture. The building was typical of much 1970s modernism in Melbourne, a truth to materials brutalism gleaned from the reformist modernity of figures like Louis Kahn, the Smithsons and principally Le Corbusier (in particular from his later works, *Ronchamp*, the Monastery at Tourette and the buildings of the Capitol Complex in Chandigarh among others). In this case this building type is given a local inflection through a subtle shift in materiality and the planting of native gardens. So I was in a sense resurrecting not just the house and my teenage history, but also a politics of form.

So what did Agamben mean when he used the word

15   Callum Morton
Valhalla (exterior), 2007

16   Callum Morton
Valhalla (exterior), 2007

17   Callum Morton
      Valhalla (interior), 2007

'Australians' when encountering this work? Did he simply read the exaggeration and scale (and expense) of the work as particularly Australian? Was he reading our politics of immigration and saddling me and all Australians with the baggage?

One thing I imagine is he didn't throw up his hands up in ecstasy, embrace Carloyn and shout to the heavens that one word 'Australians!' as if to say 'Thank Plato for their contribution to culture and ideas!' All I tend to hear is the voice of my Italian-Australian brother-in-law with his Veneto-laced impression of him — 'Australiani!' — complete with hand gestures of exasperation and dismissal.

Still I decided that I might pursue a response from him. I know that this is a rather cringey Aussie thing to do, to ask others what they think of us, but I wanted discourse not the paranoid silence I have grown so accustomed to reading as an artist. I emailed Carolyn to see if she might pass on his contact details so I could ask him.

Sadly I never received a reply from her. It was not surprising I suppose. It was after all a private moment between them that she delivered to me, the ambience of which is impossible to read, and it is one that he would more than likely not remember. She delivered the message and disappeared.

In its place, however, in the absence of Agamben, I did the other truly Australian thing: I contacted the experts at home (none of whom, incidentally, even after publishing a collection of essays on Agamben's work and editing the *Agamben Dictionary,* have ever heard from him either).

The general consensus among them was that he wasn't reading the political sphere, so much as being trivial! In this instance, in this private moment, he was the same as Bonami in his regard for Australians.

In fact, to one of these experts the comment indicates that Agamben subscribes to the idea that Australians are, as he puts it, 'tryhard blowins' who just don't get European art and thought. In his estimation it is the master / slave dialectic and the slave is always 'bad'.

In one sense I don't disagree with either Bonami or Agamben. I want to render a psychological space more than a national one, I want my work to remain open and not be so easily reconciled by a word. A continuum and development

of ideas is better than the Oedipal erasure we tend to perform with regularity here. But for all my secret desire to want to let my work simply be good in their terms (and by the way—I do always try hard), I have never been able to let it alone. I feel that I need to pick at it, to make it into something other than a version of that which is elsewhere, to exaggerate its instability. My work is, in Claire Bishop's terms, often 'antagonistic' (political) rather than 'convivial' (read ethical). I don't want to make or define a national object but I do want to have a dialogue with the local, because in a sense everything isn't global now it's local.

I am not sure in the end that I would like a true exchange with a thinker like Agamben or indeed with a curator like Bonami. That one word is probably enough to forever make me feel as I have often felt in Europe and America. Bad.

Notes

1   I was born in Montreal, Canada, in 1965.

Seeing into Ubiquity

Danae Stratou

Introduction

The Lascaux Cave Paintings in France are the earliest known images ever created by man. Since its discovery, cave art has provoked great curiosity about why it appeared, when and where it did, how it was made and what it meant to the communities that created it. David Lewis-Williams proposes that the explanation for this lies in the evolution of the human mind.[1] Cro-Magnons, unlike the Neanderthals, possessed a more advanced neurological makeup that enabled them to experience shamanistic trances and vivid mental imagery. It became important for people to 'fix', or paint, these images on cave walls, which they perceived as the membrane between their world and the spirit world from which the visions came. The notion that the first images ever made were actually expressing the need to capture 'internal' visions and bring them out, to make them visible to the 'external' world, seems to me an intriguing idea.

Point of departure | Initial process

I imagine two parallel realities in the way that we view the world. There is the world inside and the world outside us. It is through the senses that we are able to connect the inside to the outside world. My whole life, including the choice to become an artist, has been an attempt to re-search, to understand, and to connect these two parallel realities. To bridge what is within to what is without.

Naturally my works are triggered by or have a point of departure either in the external or in the internal world. Initially, an idea is generated in the form of an internal image, which in turn needs to be answered intellectually and put into context. This process seems to me to have its point

of departure in the world of the subconscious, which then surfaces into the conscious realm. Following from there, the initial idea decodes itself as it evolves into realisation and ends up 'translating itself' into an artwork. It is a bit like a journey, which slowly reveals itself as I journey along.

The reason most of my work takes the form of tactile, multimedia installations lies in my aim to involve the viewer in a physical way; to enable her or him to become immersed into it. In order to achieve this physical 'pull' I often use rhythm and repetitive movement. They reflect the pulse and recurrence that are constitutive of life. They are basic elements of life itself. Rhythm and repetition help open up and prepare the mind for the elusive connection of the conscious and subconscious worlds.

Work process | Realisation | Techniques

If we accept, as is my view, that there are two simultaneous, two parallel realities where one is within and the other external to us, then we can make the hypothesis that there are also two kinds of images. There are the images generated inside our heads, such as dreams and visions that are woven from the stuff of our conscious or unconscious imagination. Then there must be the images that reflect—however imperfectly—the external world, which we conceive as it appears to us through all of our senses. What we see, touch, hear, smell is then processed in different parts of our brain and as a result becomes the holistic experience of the world as we—each individual— perceives it. Part of this experiential process, especially if one is a visual artist, is to connect the ubiquity of the images inside to that of the outside world. This was a critical feature of the photographic sequence and the juxtaposition of a wall text written by my collaborator Yanis Varoufakis for our work *The Globalising Wall*. (Figures 18 & 19) In the exhibition 'Restless' (2012) we included the following statement:

CYPRUS: GREEN LINE | KOSOVO: NORTH-SOUTH MITROVICA | N. IRELAND: BELFAST | WEST BANK: PALESTINE | MEXICO–USA: BORDER FENCE

18   Danae Stratou and Yanis Varoufakis
      The Globalising Wall, 2011
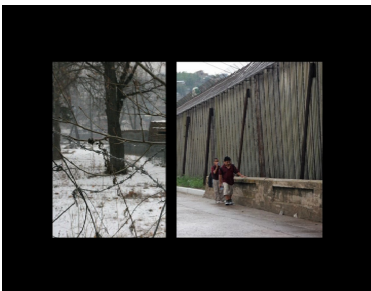
19   Danae Stratou and Yanis Varoufakis
      The Globalising Wall, 2011

> Walls have a longstanding relation both with liberty from fear and subjugation to another's will. After 1945, walls acquired an unprecedented determination to divide. They spread like a bushfire from Berlin to Palestine, from the tablelands of Kashmir to the villages of Cyprus, from the Korean peninsula to the streets of Belfast. When the Cold War ended, we were told to expect their dismantling. Instead, they are growing taller, more impenetrable, longer. They leap from one continent onto the next. They are globalising. From the West Bank to Kosovo, from the gated communities of Egypt to those of California, from the killing fields of old Ethiopia to the US-Mexico borders, a seamless wall is meandering its way, both physically and emotionally, on the planet's surface. Its spectre is upon us.

As I mentioned above, all my work is triggered or has a point of departure either in the external or in the internal world. Initially, an idea *or* an internal image is generated, which in turn needs to be answered intellectually and put into context. This intellectual process is necessary to give form to (what seems like) an inspirational idea. This procedure is not that simple, of course. It takes time for all the pieces to come together, until they can reach a final form. In the same way I imagine scientists, or mathematicians, may initially visualise a formula they instinctively believe to be true, but must then go through the elaborate process of proving it to be true. In our case, the artwork combines both the formula and the proof.

This journey hopefully results into two different kinds of works for me: the ones in which I create or construct an environment or an installation without the use of any sort of a depicted or 'external' image and then the works in which I use photography or video.

In the case of creating or 'constructing' an installation without the use of video or photography, things are quite straightforward. As the process of intellectualising an idea concludes and takes form, I first envision what it is that I want to create and I then start to work out the best way in which I will be able to realise it. At that point, as the phase of materialisation begins, I come face to face with constraints, such as natural and physical restrictions posed by the laws of nature,

material limitations, time constraints, budget limitations and so on.

At each step of the way these constraints raise questions that demand me to make choices. It is through these choices that the work takes its final form. This process is, in my opinion, crucial since it helps clarify even further and deeper the essence of the initial idea, thus helping me get rid of any non-essential elements and get even closer to the core.

In the case of the works in which I use external images, plundering with my camera the ubiquity of images around, there is a significant difference in the approach and procedure. Ever since I started working as an artist, I decided not to set up or direct the images that end up comprising my photographic and video works. On the contrary, I have made the choice to use images that I shoot as they unfold in the real world; real life moments, that is. As a result of this choice I have accepted and embraced the idea that random elements are largely a part of the quality and character of these works. There is a lot that cannot be controlled in this process. Of course this entails the risk of not 'finding' what I am looking for, as well as the risk of ending up with too little or too much footage. What I do in order to minimise these risks is that, before I embark on such a project, I have a very clear and focused idea of what it is I am aiming at. I choose my parameters and impose my own constraints on what images I want to capture. (This is similar to the other exogenous constraints that I mentioned above as well as to the restrictions that also occur in other types of project). Then, when I return to the multitude of imagery, it is as if the images I select for use (either as stills or footage for incorporation into a video work) 'present themselves', rising inconspicuously from the ubiquity, from the abundant digital material, and find their own place in the final selection, hopefully telling the story I had embarked out to tell in the first place.

Another issue that comes up in all of my work, independently of whether it is a video work or an installation project, is my effort to involve the viewer in a physical way, to enable her or him to become emerged into it. To achieve this physicality in the video/photographic works, I actually need physically to situate myself and my camera in a specific location or

condition so that it will be in the position to capture the image or portray the impact—movement, or sensation—that I am aiming for. It becomes physical through the action itself at the moment of shooting.

I have already mentioned that, to pull the viewer into the work, I often rely on rhythm and repetitive movement. Both these qualities are a basic element of life itself, as in breathing for example. Rhythm and repetition helps the mind open up to an almost 'meditational' state so that a connection of the conscious and subconscious worlds can be enabled.

Notes

1   D. Lewis-Williams, *The Mind in the Cave: Consciousness and the Origins of Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002).

Global Art and Lost Regional Histories

Ranjit Hoskote

I

Despite the negative connotations it has carried, the periphery has historically often been a more dynamic theatre of development than the centre. Much of what we call classical Greek civilisation was achieved outside Greece, in the 'colonies' located in what are today western Turkey and southern Italy, where the Greek, Phoenician, Lydian, Persian and Indian lifeworlds intersected to produce new ways of crafting reality. Similarly, the nominally Indian religion of Buddhism reached its acme outside classical India's sophisticated metropolitan centres, in the Silk Route stations of Central Asia, where, too, a vibrant synthesis of cultural forms took place. Modernism, which we all suppose to have been the invention of the metropoles of Western Europe, was first given its name — *modernismo* — far away from these centres, on the cultural fringe of Nicaragua, by the poet Rubén Darío in 1888. I take heart from these demonstrations of the experimental energy of the periphery, which has too long been identified with provincialism and belatedness, too long been denied credit for being a laboratory of cultural possibilities.

I take heart, also, from Ian North's salutary reminder, offered during his magisterial interrogation of the falsified binary of centre and periphery, that 'good art can indeed be produced anywhere'.[1] In the same spirit, I would argue that relevant ideas can indeed be produced anywhere, even if their influence is not felt immediately or globally because they have been produced in a part of the world that does not feature on the axis of the global art scene, or within a regional history or a language that has not been transmitted into the global archive of resources, citations and references.

During the last decade, I have found it deeply problematic that, while art works from what we may designate as the Global South (formerly the Third World or postcolonial societies, but, to my mind, now including pockets and enclaves of dissidence and resistance within the former First World) travel beyond their sites of origin, the contexts from which they emerge and within which they have a primary and compelling meaning, do not similarly travel. Since 2000, cultural productions from various regions in the Global South have been presented with increasing frequency by galleries, museums and biennials across the planet. But they become accepted, theorised and elaborated within a system of ideas that is still largely generated from the intellectual centres of Western Europe and Northern America (even if some of the intellectuals producing their critical positions from these centres belong to the Global South by descent).

Meanwhile, the intellectual sources that form or inform such art remain eclipsed: the exponents of such perspectives are not always members of the art world, or perhaps their work enjoys an oral circulation; the theatre of their debates may be conducted through private communication rather than public discourse; their writings may not been translated or, if written in global languages, may not have been published within the global circuit of art discourse. And, therefore, these contemporary regional formations of thought and opinion remain invisible, inaudible. In these circumstances, there is a very real danger of much art from the Global South being perceived as a set of generic outcomes prompted by a universally active globalisation, when, in truth, it is an array of cultural testimonies emerging from multiple regional modernities, each such modernity marking the specific and alternative response of a transitional society to the successive experiences of colonialism, internal discord over cultural and political direction, and globalisation. There is also the consequent danger that such art, while it makes new addresses to its new contexts, may lose some of the edge and power that it possesses in the ethos where it was first conceived and made.

I should make it clear that I do not have the modes of nostalgia, revanchism or nativism in mind when I speak of regional modernities or regional intellectual formations;

far from it. I am speaking, rather, of autonomous claims to being-in-the-world and acting-in-the-world made in a variety of sites outside Western Europe and North America yet entangled with these zones of influence, and which Okwui Enwezor has described as the plural 'wills to globality' that inspire and prompt cultural production in the Global South.[2] This is why I do not use that now outplayed adjective 'local'; to me, 'regional' encapsulates far more accurately the meld of local and global that increasingly constitutes the armature of place across our planet.

II

Speaking as an Indian-born cultural theorist and curator working transculturally, I would take India as a provisional case study, and cast this discussion in terms of a crisis of location. I believe that such a crisis challenges Indian artists today, after the demise of locality and its certitudes, and the onset of globalisation, conceived and experienced within the Indian art world as a universally executable program that inexorably overrides and transforms all regional mandates and preoccupations. In the context of Indian art and cultural production more generally—and at the risk of appearing somewhat summary and schematic—I would like to dramatise the effect of such globalisation as an interplay between two structures of transformation: the first, a structure of opportunities; the second, a structure of deficits. Whether we are artists, critics, curators or theorists, we have all been drawn into this interplay.

Globalisation as a structure of opportunities has brought all of us unprecedented possibilities of travel, collaboration and exchange; support for production; new interlocutors and audiences, and patterns of reception; and venues both for practice, in the form of studios, galleries, museums and biennials, as well as for reflection on practice, such as workshops, laboratories, and residencies. This structure of opportunities has been underwritten by a shift (not always acknowledged by the beneficiaries) in geopolitical arrangements—from the Cold War scenario of cultural warfare conducted through the Third World by the USA and the USSR, to the various soft-power initiatives launched from the 1990s onward by

countries such as Japan, the Netherlands, South Korea, Australia and Germany, among many others. These soft-power initiatives have been mapped over the work of transnational foundations and organisations such as the Triangle Arts Trust, HIVOS, the Prince Claus Fund, the Goethe-Institut, the Japan Foundation and so forth.

On the other hand, globalisation has also manifested itself as a structure of deficits. The mythology of broken borders and imaginative flight-paths can sometimes imply a rejection of alternative positions developed within the context of late-colonial and postcolonial modernity, so that the value of postcoloniality as an adversarial position comes to be questioned, and the supersession of the Cold War cultural universe is translated as a rejection of choices made during the 1950s and 1960s, as wrong moves or historical errors—but which, in fact, may bear and even reward revisiting during the contemporary crisis of location. In India, these acts of rejection have produced an extraordinary amnesia towards the foundational texts that have sustained the emergence of this transitional society: as figures lying embalmed in the mausoleum of official history, M. K. Gandhi, Rabindranath Tagore, Jawaharlal Nehru and B. R. Ambedkar no longer circulate in the Indian public sphere as the restless originators of richly provocative, passionately interrogative philosophical experiments with cultural selfhood, the politics of subaltern agency and intercultural communication.

I find myself asking whether it is possible to retrieve, from this lost history of India's regional modernity, the utopian ideas of cosmopolitanism and intercultural dialogue, both phrased as critiques of the nation-state and insular patriotism, that we find in the writings of Tagore (*Nationalism*, 1916) and Nehru (*The Discovery of India*, 1946), published as both these authors stood at the threshold of momentous global changes. In Tagore and in Nehru we find dynamic proposals for activating connections beyond the cultural space of a nation or a nation-state, with the emphasis on finding interlocutors with whom we may not share histories, but with whom we may share other a variety of affinities and urgencies.

Tagore and Nehru premised their visions on an evolving selfhood that was receptive to a plurality of experience and

contexts, as against the fixity of identities, and yet remained anchored in specific political predicaments, such as the need to dismantle the perceived and palpable power asymmetries held over from the colonial epoch. The leitmotif of these ideas was not parochiality or a turning inward and away from the world, but a confident self-releasement or a turning outward to embrace the world.

Tagore's dream of a pan-Asian dialogue led him to bring together, through publications and assemblies, the contemporary themes and questions that exercised intellectuals and artists in India, China, Korea and Japan; his dream informed the curriculum as well as the architecture of his experimental university, Santiniketan. Nehru's concerns, likewise, led him to subscribe to the ideology of Afro-Asian solidarity as well as to support utopian modernism: in Nehruvian India, these choices were articulated, variously, through the establishment of the global Non-Aligned Movement, the commissioning of Le Corbusier to design the new city of Chandigarh and of Louis Kahn to design a new management institute in Baroda, and in the establishment of Triennale India in 1968, which staked the claim of the Global South to host large-scale exhibitions of international art.

III

Such ideas need urgently to be brought out of the mausoleum and the library, and to be put back in play. Without them, globalisation as a structure of opportunities merely becomes a structure of anxieties and chance encounters, marking a generic belonging to a global system but in reality merely confirming recruitment into the global culture industry. While Indian artists—or artists from any transitional society—are not ambassadors for their location, especially when they now operate confidently in a transcultural space, I would suggest they have a choice between such a complacent globalisation of recruitment and a more unstable globalisation of resistance, where globalisation recognises itself to be a contested and turbulent, not an inevitable and apocalyptically redeeming, condition. The structure of deficits has meant, for a number of Indian artists, an evacuation of political energy from cultural production and a pursuit of floating images and narratives

that signal instead of wrestling with the existential challenges of the global present.

Can we, therefore, imagine the possibility of recovering a conceptual space between a superseded and limiting local, and an overwhelming and generic global? Could we invoke the trope of the retrieval of unfinished projects, alternative temporalities, unattained utopias, to suggest the historical outlines and possible cartography of this conceptual space? And what better setting in which to represent, argue and mediate the claims of regional modernities than the biennial, which is quintessentially the parliament of unhoused narratives, lost memories, travelling images and nascent ideas seeking fluid locations?

It seems to me that the biennial—as a self-recursive yet self-disruptive periodic platform, as a temporary museum and itinerant archive, as an assembly of nomads committed to their practice but also to larger communities of practice, as the ground where the global cultural contemporary is being coproduced by diverse contributors—is the optimal laboratory where such an adventure may be proposed.

We are all aware that the nomad, as the preferred figure for the cultural producer who works transculturally, is a problematic and problematised figure: nomads like ourselves are often accused of enjoying the privilege of travel while millions of anonymous migrants cross borders in fear and desperation. But the nomad remains an attractive figure nonetheless, for she or he can also be a secular pilgrim, phrasing his or her pilgrimage as a quest for themes and questions that allow for a releasement of self towards others, towards locations that invite empathetic engagement, and towards seemingly quixotic and tangential ideas whose reserve of relevance has not been exhausted.

Notes

1   Ian North, respondent in panel on 'Global Frames and Critical Ruptures in Contemporary Art', convened by Nikos Papastergiadis and Victoria Lynn, Adelaide Festival Artists' Week, 26 February 2010.

2   O. Enwezor, *The Black Box* Documenta II-Platform 5/ Kassel, exhibition catalogue (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002), 47.

III: Into Cosmos

Contemporary art is not only a symbol of the globalising forms that are reshaping our everyday life, it also acts as a sphere in which we imagine the world anew. Artists see themselves as opening new frontiers in the aesthetic form and in the social context of visual experience. These transformations in artistic practice prompt a rethinking of how we explain the modality of creative imagination, from its classical roots as a cosmic force, an expression of mental faculties and as a product of its material environment. It has also provoked a radical appraisal of cosmopolitanism as a term that can refer to the widest possible forms of belonging.

Throughout history cosmopolitanism has often surfaced as a concept that addresses the meaning of the subject at both the core of being and the widest spheres of belonging. It can be traced back to mythological fascination with the abyss of the void and the infinite cosmos, as well as recurring in philosophical debates about the relationship between individual freedom and universal rights. In this section, the contributors revisit the need to give form to — to make a world out of — these extremities. There is a common exploration of the realm of the imagination. From Jan Verwoert's retracing of the function of magic in mimetic forms to Barbara Creed's exploration of the boundary between animals and humans, there is a shared pursuit of the quest by artists to make the inanimate feel as if it is animate. The spirit that lurks in objects and the fascination with unbound energy is also the focus of Paul Carter's and Linda Marie Walker's ruminations on mystic poets and contemporary visual artists. These essays are in equal part expositions and meditations on art's function as a world picture-making process.

The cosmos is not some infinite and other-worldly zone, it is at one level already here at hand, perceptible in the banal elements and micro-details of everyday life and produced through the activities that give life its order and meaning. The cosmos of art can be seen through a complex ecology that notes the interplay of mental faculties with a social context and also sees formal innovation as a manifestation of the order that injects meaning into the world. Hence, the chapters in this section range from the cosmological to the sociological; they adopt voices that include the shamanic and the empathic.

Aristotle noted that the soul never thinks with the phantasm. The academic discourse on creativity has neither found an adequate answer to the meaning of soul nor established a system to contain the allure of the image. Instead of retreating into the available philosophical or psychological categories, the authors in this section have created a socio-poetic typology of creativity that reaches into the realm from which art begins and then points towards the horizons that elude the grip of reason.

NP & VL

Why is Art Met with Disbelief? It's Too Much like Magic

Jan Verwoert

I: Demands?

Art is jinxed. And the curse is double. Like inexorcisable demons, two questions follow it around, no matter how hard we try to ward them off. 'What is it good for?' some inquire, while others demand to know, 'What does it represent?' So art gets wrenched between two impatient requests: to have its use value revealed and its meaning declared. In effect, the power of status is at work in both curses. Status is a restless devil. It wants to be identified and have its name spelled out. It won't rest before it is. In surprising unison the working and upper class are eager to oblige: yes, the status of art must be identified, as soon as possible, and at all cost.

Class perspectives only differ in terms of the standards applied to measure status. Even if, in the 1970s, many workers moved on up from factory halls to office floors, their world view mostly remained rooted in the traditional utilitarian mindset: a thing only qualifies as real — and its maker as respectable — if its making can be shown to serve a recognisable purpose. If not, it's deemed a queer trade and waste of money that an honest man cannot afford to be seen indulging in. People with an interest in being recognised as upper class will wish to associate themselves with the notion of being 'cultured' and hence consider buying or funding art. Yet, only if its status is widely confirmed. While the working man will want to know what the art *costs* (invariably too much!), a person with high disposable income will need to see what it's *worth* (in five years time).

It's a farce. But we're in it. And escaping the impasse isn't easy. Stock-in-trade arguments for defending the value of art

for art's sake won't hold up to interrogation. Art: autonomous? No. We can't deny that artistic survival depends on material interests and symbolic transfers brokered in the status economy. Art: a path to 'higher values'? A difficult point to argue when making art is what you do on a daily basis, so the utterly mundane nature of this activity is your first-hand experience. Why pretend it was otherwise? The trouble is you can't bank on it either. For, even though it's work to you, it doesn't mean that most people wouldn't much rather look upon it as a form of being idle. When grand claims to the exceptional metaphysical status of artistic labour have become a thing of the past, and chances of it ever qualifying as regular wage labour seem remote (and hardly attractive), our position isn't exactly easy.

Changing someone's idea of status and value is difficult. Because they tend to defend this idea as if their life depended on it. In some sense it actually does. For people will have made existential decisions and given their lives a direction based on standards of status and value that seemed desirable, or without alternative, at the time. Art then presents a potential threat, as it shows that there are indeed alternatives to the standards on which their existences are built. It's a classic among the top twenty conversations from hell: getting cross-examined over Sunday dinner by prospective in-laws who, with increasing persistence, try to elicit a confession from you to confirm their suspicion that 1. art is a big fraud ('I could paint something like that!') and 2. modern artists are pretentious impostors who con people out of their money by selling them stuff of no real value. In such a situation, defending art as a realm in which value can be freely negotiated seems hardly worth trying. Arguments will neither change the residual beliefs, nor will they relieve the fears that are at stake when art is met with disbelief.

It may sound like truisms out of a self-help book. But when the challenge is to stand up and not give in to the pressure imposed by a status economy of bad faith, the problem undeniably also has a spiritual dimension: *In what spirit* then are we to meet those who demand art's status to be declared and its meaning to be revealed?

To begin with, what would be needed is something akin to an exorcism. Arguably, what gives the demand for art's

status to declare its immense power is that it's usually already deeply internalised by those, us, who are habitually exposed to it. We take it to heart. Knowing that, before long, we will have to absolve yet another ceremony of justification, we prepare ourselves, arrange our defenses and, worse still, potentially go as far as to (re)organise our practices according to whatever new paradigm currently appears to be imbued with the magical power to bestow instant legitimacy on what we do. (From today's book of incantations we recommend 'research-based art' or 'art as a form of knowledge production'.) It's a game we can only lose, because the rules are written by others. The point is to cast the demon of status out, so that next time you meet the demon his voice is not also coming from the back of your own head, but clearly only from the person confronting you, articulating *their* beliefs and fears, not yours. This is not to suggest that there would or should be a space of uncompromised autonomy (aka naivity/genius) in which we could want to retreat. The demand for art's status to be declared will always be there. What makes all the difference, however, is whether you engage it on its terms — or in a spirit of subtle defiance nourished on other experiences and perspectives. So where to look for these?

II: Rhythm and rhyme!
The point is to relate. Wildly. To people, things, ideas, visible and invisible, sublime and mundane phenomena and occurences of all kinds, that may or may not even be proven to exist by positive science, but nonetheless surround us everyday, like nature and urban life do. 'Wildly' means: not in accordance with a preset standards of equivalency, the rule of the tit for tat, that governs economical thinking and permits status/value to be quantified, taxed and compared. What incites the urge to dodge quantification and relate wildly is not only rebelliousness. It's a deeply *environmental* concern. Environments are more than just economies. What matters in environments, instead of values and status, is *qualities* and *states*. Qualities such as: small rather than big, wet rather than dry, silver rather than blue … States like: liquid rather than frozen or vaporous, animated rather than inanimate, thinking rather than unthinking …

What does it mean to relate to such environmental qualities? It's not even clear whether it means *to act*. Getting soaked in the rain is not an action. But it's definitely a state experienced as a result of entering (into a relation to) an environment. To paint one particular colour or draw a specific shape would no doubt seem to pass as an action. But *getting a sense* for the quality of this colour and shape, for its reason to be and remain in the mix (rather than become erased or overpainted) has fairly little to do with a logic of purposeful action. Rather, it's a longterm process of attuning oneself to the decisive relations and tensions between the qualities and states within an environment, as much as within the work. This is not just some consideration of the laws of more or less tasteful composition. Rather, it's a sense for what does, or precisely doesn't, *rhyme* or *resonate*.

Rhyme and resonance can neither be declared nor quantified. Rhyme is not a status something or someone could acquire. It's an environmental relation between elements with a certain chemistry between them. Rhyme is a *mimetic quality*: a characteristic of two words, shapes, sounds, colours (and so on) that exist in the state of being *somehow alike*. That the line 'To be with you' rhymes with 'Waiting on a line of greens and blues' isn't premised on them sharing the same status, neither semantically nor grammatically. Strictly speaking, it doesn't make an ounce of sense that the two lines should resonate with each other. But they do. And this is just one given example. There are myriad more, naturally.

Finding a rhyme or rhythm that sticks, however, is not just a matter of matching elements from a given set of parts. It's much rather a recalibration of relations within a whole. A rhythm that works creates a connection between the sound a thing (drum) makes when hit and the desire to move your body. Likewise, a rhyme (if it's any good) triggers the desire to mimic its workings, to rhyme the rhyme, repeat, learn and intonate it, to sing along. When they work, rhythm and rhyme not only constitute a relation between beats and words, but very much also an overall force-field, within which energies are accumulated and given a particular quality and direction. A room full of people dancing or a child crooning along to a nursery rhyme are two examples of mimetic relations in

the state of being activated or animated. In each case the *momentum* of the activated or animated relation shapes and transforms *the mood*—that is, the very condition for experiencing—a given environment. A space in which people sit and work is not the same space as one in which people drink and dance together, even if, physically, it may be the same room.

The emphasis here, however, is not necessarily on 'together'. The element of correspondance which generates the energy at the heart of the mimetic relation is precisely *not* an identity relation. 'Blue' is not 'You'. They are two different words. The Beat is not the dance move. One is made by a drum. The other by a hip. Still they correspond. Correspondence in a state of non-identity allows for a transformation of realities that no one reality principle or symbolic economy based on laws of equivalency can contain. Take a traditional Italian nursery rhyme for example:[1]

> Ambarabà ciccì coccò
> Tre civette sul comò
> Che facevano l'amore
> Con la figlia del dottore
> Il dottore si ammalò
> E la figlia si sposò
> Ambarabà ciccì coccò!

Under the sign and spell of the (purely phonetic) *Ambarabà ciccì coccò*, the calculus of *quid pro quo* is replaced by the logic of rhyme, assonance and rythm. Following this new logic, reality reconfigures itself along a skewed axis: three owls on a dresser make love to the doctor's daughter, the doctor gets ill and the daughter gets herself married. Under the spell of the *Ambarabà ciccì coccò*, animals, furniture and family relations shift into a new constellation in which per- and in- versions of all kinds take place. In the world of mimetic power, healing is the art of curing like with like. It's risky. For relations can flip. Then the fire you start to fight fire, is the fire than comes to burn you. Like consumes like. The shaman is caught in his own spell. The doctor gets ill. As happens in the lullaby. Scary! But exhilarating too! Because in a world where laws of identity and difference apply no longer, intercourse with nightbirds

is legal and, although it may cast a strange light on the latter, doesn't prevent marriage.

Now, picture the situation in which the rhyme is sung and repeated over and over by parent or nurse and child and you see a pathway open into a *magical world*. To perform the rhyme together is to enter *and* inhabit this world. You are *in* it when you sing it. You experience how the world governed by the symbolic status economy of the *quid pro quo*—where this means this and that means that—fades away and transitions into the state of *ciccì coccò* where all things have different qualities: The colours of the dark vowels ò and e and the sharp rhythm of the double consonants cc and tt evoke—and in the course of their very evocation create—the shades and contours of the world of owls, dressers, doctors and daughters. Given that the nursery rhyme will also be sung as a lullaby, the magical world of rhythm and rhyme here also prefigures the reality of the dream into which it builds a bridge, as the child is lulled to sleep by the rythmical return of resonant words looping back onto the magic formula *Ambarabà ciccì coccò*.

III: Environmental, not economical

It's not a prerogative of art to effect this transition into the magical world of mimesis. A simple lullaby can do the trick. At the same time, however, art fundamentally continues to be associated with the *magic of mimesis*: in terms of the classic notion of drawing or painting after nature, or 'taking some-one's likeness'—but also very much in terms of the qualities of rhythm and rhyme, a-, dis-, con- and re- sonance which make up the material magic of the sympathetic attraction or antipathic friction we (misleadingly) refer to as principles of composition. A philosophy of the *Ambarabà ciccì coccò* could offer a much more adequate way to describe what forces are at play in art that yields to the magic of its own material workings.

The crux, however, is that the *Ambarabà ciccì coccò* can't actually be appropriated as a concept without its secret and spirit being lost in that act. Asserted as a principle 'as such' the *ciccì coccò* will turn into a display of mere childishness, or madness. Mimetic magic is a relational force. It only comes into effect when it can resonate with other things, people,

qualities and states within an environment. This holds true even and especially now that, in modern urban artistic contexts, we're no longer dealing with tribal magic proper, but instead with whatever residual element of that magic has survived in nursery rhymes and the 'compositional' material dimension of art practice. It's all in the interplay of relations. This is why, magical as it may be, the element of the mimetic must frustrate attempts to use it as an argument in defense of art's status or significance. 'What is art good for?'—'Well, it's magic.'—'How so? Prove it! Seeing is believing!' In an environment where no sympathy prevails, magic never works, only the most obvious tricks do.

Organised religions authorise a priest to make aspiring believers feel it must be *their* fault if they don't feel or see anything during a religious service. No doubt, there are still artists around who try, and sometimes succeed, in (re)creating the same conditions by instituting their own religions of devoted disciples, supportive critics and so on, so as to give them the right to condemn disbelievers as stupid or evil. It's life in a lie. And paranoia is the price the gods of their own church tend to pay when they fear the outside world to be conspiring against the doctrine of their greatness. So we know the securities cults offer are false. And, lest we forget, religions, for times immemorial, have primarily served as institutions for enforcing unjust power structures. Hence there's no need to be nostalgic for the cultic. The true challenge is to engage the forces, qualities and states of the *Ambarabà ciccì coccò* without institutional backup: without any guarantee that the magic of mimesis will work—for everyone, and more than once, that is, on the next day too, if it worked the night before. When there's no priest to watch over the performance of the magic rite and ensure that the audience feels sufficiently awestruck (or guilty for not feeling anything), the attempt to bring your art to life and summon the spirit of your ideas in front of an audience can always misfire. And the embarrassment is yours. You stand exposed as a failed conjurer. But this is how it is, and how it can only be, when we reject the false securities of religions. The possibility of total embarrassment is built into the very condition of practising the magic of the mimetic (as art) outside the cult. So what can we do? But embrace it!

It's an insight that offers little comfort, but may still inform the spirit in which to meet the demand for art's status to be declared. The intimate tie that connects art to the magic of the mimetic is precisely what won't permit its status to be unambiguously identified. In a profound manner, art is about relations rather than representations, about qualities and states, rather than status. But this in itself is no secret. It's probably fair to assume that so much pressure is put on art precisely because people sense that they deal with a cultural force here — mimesis — which, although present and at play amid everyday culture, from nursery rhymes to radio hits, still remains fundamentally *alien* to the mindset of modern economic rationality.[2]

The irony is that the mimetic element (and art as its token advocate) survives in such an awkward position amid modern economical representational and techno-scientific culture, not because it is altogether alien, but because, arguably, it's the very source from which modern culture once sprang. Science emerged from alchemy and gradually came to substitute magic as the most prevalent technique for relating to the natural world. Likewise, the economical operations of assigning values to things to trade them, arguably stem from ceremonies of consecration and gift giving in which symbolic transactions are inseparable from the larger religious or tribal set of beliefs and rules in accordance with which they are enacted. In this sense, modern economic and techno-scientific culture only seeks to disavow, deny and repress the connection to its very own origins. Since art is a visible remainder and reminder of this connection, it gets a lot of flak to catch, by proxy. In meeting art with disbelief, the modern world expunges the unmanageable truth that its very own operating principles originated in magic rites.

And, in effect, it makes no difference if art is dismissed as irrational or fetishised as a source of magical illuminations on Sunday visits to the Met. 'The Magical' is a pedestal from which art can only fall, when the notion that creators of art are higher beings is propagated as a justification for distinguishing 'high' from 'popular' culture. Isolated, however, from the world of mundane relations in which alone it could actually activate its magic (like the lullaby does), a revered

masterpiece can only ever disappoint. Invariably, the Van Gogh one religiously queues up to see will leave no impression, as the high expectations to have it deliver an instant epiphany prevents it from having any effect at all.

The bottom line, if there is any, probably is that, in art, we are unofficial heirs to the powers of mimesis. But, even if we agree to take on this heritage it will never be exclusively ours. There is no way to *own* mimesis. It's everywhere anyhow, alive and at play in every rhythm and rhyme that works and all things or works we perceive as animated. Which, on the other hand, is also a way of saying that art is never isolated, in the first place. It finds itself connected on all sides into the circuits of mimetic energy loops, from radio hits to bird calls. Urban rituals and natural phenomena play the same role here. They set the rhythms and moods to which a practice may want to attune itself (con-, as-, dis- or re- sonantly) in the course of activating the qualities and states that animate an environment *as* an environment. Relational at heart, such a practice of animation will perhaps never acquire a clearly distinguishable status in and for itself, the less the more it resonates qualitatively with its surroundings. Yet, at the same time, it will, most vividly, give you an idea why art could be considered a truly environmental practice.

Notes

1   I thank Federica Bueti for introducing me to the rhyme.
2   Here, I paraphrase a thought developed in T. W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minessota Press, 1997), 118–20.

The Tender Heart

Linda Marie Walker

This writing begins with eight images of artworks by four Adelaide artists: John Barbour, Louise Haselton, Anton Hart and Aldo Iacobelli (Figures 20–23). These works are not 'examples' of 'the tender heart'; the artists do not discuss their work in this way. However, for me, in each of the artists' practice there seems an extended-play affect, a spun-out aspect (or impression); intensities gather as the substance or consistency of the work, and groups of work, is distributed or spread, as if kneaded or turned over and over by hands—not solid visible hands, but those of a subtle-body with other sense-desires (other skin/animal pads).[1]

Firstly, and briefly, and before *the tender heart,* there is 'the heart' and what is meant by (using) 'the-heart', as heart-thinking is an ancient thinking. The heart was once believed to be the organ of perception; perception, or sensation, comes from the Greek word 'aisthesis'—breathing in, taking in the world, in wonder, shock, amazement; the view before one was met with an aesthetic response. The heart was also the place of the imagination. In an aesthetic heart response sensing and imagining the world, facts and fantasies, were not split from each other. 'Heart' then, in this context, is not the sentimental subjective romantic idea of heart. It is the forgotten heart, one that has been replaced by the brain or intellect as the centre-of-understanding. With this view of the world, and making sense of the world, it is possible, writes James Hillman, whose work on the heart is the primary source here, to recognise 'that each thing smiles, [and] has allure'. [2] Hillman was trying to reorientate the practice of psychology, and in turn the practices of creativity, by reconnecting with the heart of the sensing kind: 'a way might open again toward a meta-psychology that is a cosmology, a poetic vision of the cosmos which

20   John Barbour
      Mercury, 2011

21   Anton Hart
     detail from *Burn Out 1*, 2011

fulfils the soul's need for placing itself in the vast scheme of things'.[3] The heart (that is moved, that trembles, warms, melts opens (and is tender(ed)) sees things, and sees the suffering of things. Hillman is writing about a particular education (in psychotherapy) but more generally his ideas bring into focus the learning and teaching of creative practices:

> training ... requires sophistication of perception. Training [a new training] will be based in the imagining, sensing heart ... [training] the eye and ear, nose and hand to ... craft well ... And our questions will be addressed to *what* things are, and *where,* and *who,* and in which precise way they are as they are, rather than *why, how come,* and *what for.*[4]

Thoughts about the tender-heart arrive obliquely, like spells and rituals, and within a dimension of time and space where the whole body is of another material, or condition, and hears, as a result, other voices. Thoughts about the tender-heart are complex, ambiguous and irreverent; the tender-heart knows it is in the company of all other hearts.

Art is a world-making endeavour that can bring unlikely, ungainly, broken, and discarded matters and textures and colours and atmospheres alive (and into other-life for themselves); art can let fall (away) certain structures of certainty, for example, 'subject-object, left-right, inner-outer, masculine-feminine, immanence-transcendence, mind-body'.[5] This is not radical or new thinking; it is moderate, sober and old, a turning, a re-turning; this returning is a turning toward the world, toward its every-very-face, so as to regard it as it re-gards us, face to face, or heart to heart. This is a matter of language, of what we speak, and how we speak—not about 'our-feelings' but, rather, about what is-there (and not an abstraction of what is-there), and in the face of 'is-there', a making-process that is fluid, evanescent.[6] So as to make the world another world, one that is actually present in its own wild imagination, borderless, cosmic and transitory.

What could be the politic that creeps along the surface beneath or above or in parallel with the surface of the circumstances of collapse, war, speed, exhaustion and so on,

where the opportunity to have one's voice heard is slim—but this slimness is a place, somewhere and everywhere.[7] That is, its form or voice is yet to be invented (or has always been being invented), or is already being invented by gatherings on the terrace[8]—the unsignposted place, or ground, that comes about, that transpires, that one is shown (taken to) by the friend, the enemy, or the 'shaman'.[9]

All the future has of us is fragments, as we do of the past, and artists make some of those fragments; fragments carry in their cells unique combinations of ideas, concerns, fears, obsessions and images through time, to emerge at distant critical events as unimaginable chances for joy, quiet and peace as well as pain, noise and war; they 'speak' and dream (us), in other words.

In 1989 John Berger wrote of defeat and revenge in an essay for an exhibition called 'Miners', of paintings and drawings by the Stampe brothers, at the Cleveland Gallery, England. He wrote:

> when gradually you realize that They are out to break you, out to break your inheritance, your skills, your communities, your poetry, your clubs, your home and, wherever possible, your bones too, when finally people realize this, they may also hear, striking in their head, the hour of assassinations, of justified vengeance ... And nothing could be more human, more tender than such a proposed vision of the pitiless being ... executed by the pitiful. It is the word 'tender' which we cherish and which They can never understand, for they do not know what it refers to ... I would shield any such hero to my fullest capacity. Yet if, during the time I was sheltering him, he told me he liked drawing, or ... she told me she'd always wanted to paint, and had never had the chance or the time to do so, if this happened, then I think I'd say: Look, if you want to, it's possible you may achieve what you are setting out to do in another way, a way less likely to fall out on your comrades and less open to confusion. I can't tell you what art does and how it does it, but I know that often art has judged the judges, pleaded revenge to the innocent and shown to the future what the past suffered, so that it has never been

22   Louise Haselton
Greek Chorus, 2011

23   Aldo Iacobelli
Architectural Drawing VII, 2010

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24   Kerrie Stratford
      Change, 2011

forgotten … Art, when it functions like this, becomes a
meeting-place of the invisible, the irreducible, the endur-
ing, guts, and honour.[10]

Tenderness is remembered and restored in acts; heartness is
'how' a thing goes (how it moves) in thought, or in the world—
as attention paid to what-is; sense, says Jean-Luc Nancy, 'must
be signified in all possible ways, by each and every one of us,
by all "individual" or "collective" singularities … by all that
can make someone somewhere … [make] sense … [receive]
sense … [or leave] sense open'.[11]

 The heart and tenderness have to be imagined.[12] The heart,
as the source of tenderness, is not the heart that is inward
looking, it's the heart that is outward looking, seeing the world
with 'wondrous-strange' eyes. The tender heart places itself
in the world. D. H. Lawrence wrote: 'The wonder is without
me. The wonder is outside me … I look with wonder, with
tenderness, with joyful yearning towards that which is outside
me, beyond me.' [13] The thinking heart has to see the world
thinking back; see the exactness of each thing with its own
imagined heart—the animal among animals the thing among
things, the heart in empathy with all hearts.[14]

 This writing ends with a painting by Kerrie Stratford
(Figure 24), an artist who lives in regional South Australia.
Her images connect the personal, animal, vegetable and thing
world. They are like incantations, compounds of wonders, of
strange dark goings-on, and fragility. Anything can happen
and affect anything else; the state-of-the-heart, its openness
to joy, fear and sadness, is radiant and imminent. The images
teem with differences through repetitious and renewed mark-
making, the composed scenes hold a sense (a disposition) that
they have 'come-to-light', brilliant, for a moment, as a 'stage', a
stilled-life, along the way, seared into the air. They are images
in-between this life and that life, this time and that time, male
and female; we see what we cannot see. Henri Corbin, writing
on the creative imagination of the Sufi poet Ibn 'Arabi, says of
making images appear:

 this precisely is the function of … our creativity, to
 make them appear, that is, to give them being. Here our

creativity merges with the very core, the *heart,* of our being; what we cause to appear, what we project before us and beyond us—and also what judges us—is our [creativity], our *enthymesis.*[15]

This 'making appear' of images is a tender-heartedness, an encouragement, toward the work of world-making that the imagination is endlessly 'making appear' *to-us* instant to instant, touching literally what we (by ourselves) cannot touch—our thoughts as we receive them.

Notes

1   This writing is composed like a set of cards (with Brian Eno's cards 'Oblique Strategies' in mind—chance instructions for making creative works), each a miniature or fragment-essay.

2   J. Hillman, *The Thought Of The Heart and The Soul of the World* (New York: Spring Publications, 1998), 109.

3   Ibid., 110.

4   Ibid., 112–13.

5   Ibid., 129.

6   Jean-Luc Nancy writes that art 'brings forth a desire that is neither the desire for an object nor the desire for a meaning but a desire for feeling and for feeling oneself first—a desire to experience oneself as irreducible to a signification, to a being or an identity. A desire to enjoy … the very fact that there is no unique and final form in which this desire would reach its end … A desire to enjoy, in sensibility, the very fact that there is no unique and final form in which this desire would reach its end.' J-L. Nancy, *Philosophical Chronicles* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 61–2.

7   On the 'the eighth climate/place of nowhere' and 'the place that one is taken to', see H. Corbin, *Mundus Imaginalis. Or the Imaginary and the Imaginal* (1972) <http://henrycorbinproject.blogspot.com.au/2009/10mundus-imaginalis-or-imaginary-and-html>.

8   Terrace, from Latin *terra*: earth, earthy, earthy, earth-born.

9   Perhaps a kind of surrender to the impossible, to an anxiety or suspicion that there is something to be done that is non-declamatory; instead, is within the process and then the work (as if by magic), and is unsure and unnamed, extending outward—open-handed, willingly stupid and unanticipated.

10   J. Berger, 'Miners', in *Keeping a Rendezvous* (New York: Vintage International, 1992), 8–9.

11   J-L. Nancy, *The Sense of the World,* trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2008), 165.

12   Tenderness as a touch gives pleasure in the heart-to-heart intention of it, its message. Nancy writes: 'By means of the touch of the senses, pleasure surprises and suspends the enchainment of signifying senses', Nancy, *The Sense of the World,* 134. In this surprise and suspense, that comes and goes, as an interruption of the supposed fabric of continuity, presence as magic, as magical empathy emerges, as sensuous surface, or as impossible oscillating surface, non-sensible,

non-representational; surface after surface catching the ghosts, giving ghosts—who pull at our hearts—places to gather and talk.

13   D.H. Lawrence, in Hillman, 12; James Hillman borrows from Henri Corbin and Alfred Whitehead among others. Hillman's focus is a particular kind of psycho-analysis that attends to the soul of the world; this focus includes practices of creative making, of how we touch that soul with artefacts that leave out bodies and have lives of their own. I'm interested in when-and-how the heart-felt comes through artworks into the affective circulatory realm of materials and arrangements—into the tactile and visual atmosphere of being-with others where experience becomes part of the thinking feeling body (and part of the body of the world), physically and emotionally; we write and speak of what we see, which in turn is affective, and can decrease or increase a work of art's potential to unfold as life over time.

14   The heartfelt is not the confessional 'I', not the person-singular, not the report of my-experience via my-expression—this sort of report, of our single-said actions, separates us, peels us away, from the 'huge full world', Hillman, 35; this heart exiles imagination, being subjective and guarded.

15   H. Corbin, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1970), 236; *enthymesis* is a Greek word that 'signifies the act of meditating, conceiving, imagining, projecting, or ardently desiring', of having something present in the heart, in the soul, in thought, Corbin, 222.

The Elephant's Graveyard: Spectres of the Abyss?

Barbara Creed

And when you gaze long into an abyss,
the abyss also gazes into you.

Frederich Nietzsche[1]

What is the abyss? Various definitions refer to it as primal chaos, the bottomless pit, a yawning gulf, an unfathomable chasm, an immeasurably profound depth or void — night, space, darkness. Some poets, painters and writers tell us it is death itself. All societies have a concept of the abyss or death, of that which terrifies but also fascinates. The nineteenth-century German philosopher, Frederich Nietzsche, famously said: 'And when you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss also gazes into you.'[2] For Nietzsche, the abyss signifies a yawning gulf, nihilism, a world without meaning, truth and purpose. The individual who is unable to give meaning to the world, through interpretation, faces the abyss. Artist Dan McEwen explored Nietzsche's concept of the abyss with a work titled *When you gaze into the abyss, and the abyss stares back at you, do you blink?* The figure in McEwen's work appears to be in a womb-like space, surrounded by darkness. The womb is central to an understanding of the abyss, as I shall discuss shortly in this exploration of the relationship between art and the abyss, where I ask 'What is the origin of our fascination with the eternal abyss and its influence on the spark of imagination?'

The main issue I wish to pursue concerns the relationship between the abyss and other species. Here I am defining the abyss as a signifier of an unfathomable chasm, death and nothingness. Why have we — as human animals — constructed

such a concept? Are we the only species to do so? Why does the abyss inspire such a powerful range of emotions? How do artists represent animals in relation to the abyss? The influential and anthropocentric seventeenth-century French philosopher, René Descartes, argued that non-human animals not only lack intelligence and emotions but the ability to understand death, even their own deaths.[3] Animals, he argued, were like automata, machines without feeling or reason. According to Nicolaas Rupke the theory of the animal as 'beast-machine' grew in favour after Descartes' death and was taken up in medical and ecclesiastical circles.[4]

In his eyewitness account of eighteenth-century practices, Nicolas Fontaine wrote that in the belief that animals were automata they were beaten 'with the utmost indifference'. The cries they emitted were regarded as the sounds that might be made by a machine. Fontaine wrote:

> [They] nailed the poor animals to boards by the four paws to dissect them while still alive, in order to watch the circulation of the blood, which was a great subject of discussion.[5]

Voltaire, the eighteenth-century French Enlightenment philosopher, responded to Descartes' view that animals were automata:

> Barbarians seize this dog, which in friendship surpasses man so prodigiously; they nail it on a table, and they dissect it alive in order to show the mesenteric veins. You discover in it all the same organs of feeling that are in yourself. Answer me, machinist, has nature arranged all the means of feeling in this animal, so that it may not feel? Has it nerves in order to be impassible? Do not suppose this impertinent contradiction in nature.[6]

Descartes' view had profound moral consequences for the treatment of animals in future centuries. In response to Descartes, Jeremy Bentham famously wrote:

> But a full grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a

more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? But, Can they *suffer*?[7]

The practice of live vivisection continued into the nineteenth century. In 1832, Emile-Edouard Mouchy painted a work titled *A Physiological Demonstration with Vivisection of a Dog* in which a group of men crowd around an operating table, watching the vivisection of the animal which, because it was presumably without feelings, was not given an anesthetic. Deaf to the agonised cries of the dog, it is the scientists who appear unable to express any emotions. Charles Darwin's publication *The Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals* (1872) presents a very different view from that of Descartes.[8] Darwin argued that the emotions evolved in human and animal alike and that animals experience almost all the emotions expressed by the human animal. If we agree with Darwin that animals share many emotions expressed by humans including fear, distress and grief, why wouldn't animals have a comprehension of death? The Cartesian view helps explain why it is that the human animal sees itself as endowed with a finer range of sensibilities than non-human animals, including the supposedly unique ability to understand the meaning and inevitability of death. Various philosophers and authors, from Martin Heidegger to Georges Bataille, have argued that this is what distinguishes human from animal. Only man is aware of his impending death—of the abyss.

All animals experience pain and terror. How can we say with confidence that they do not also have a knowledge of the abyss? Of their own deaths? Elephants we know engage in mourning rituals over their dead as well as conducting burial ceremonies.[9] What then is the significance of the narrative of the Elephant's Graveyard—that fabled place to which all elephants journey when they know they are about to die? Many creatures such as apes, rhinoceros and dolphins express grief at the loss of a partner or offspring. Some creatures, including snakes, beetles and spiders will feign death, or play possum, when presented with a threat. What does it mean to

say that animals do not comprehend death? How do artists represent the abyss and emotions in relation to animals?

The abyss takes many forms. To some it signifies fear and dread. To others an encounter with the abyss is essential to self-knowledge. Here I will first consider a number of ways in which scientists, artists, writers and filmmakers have represented the abyss, before discussing animals and death.

The abyss as a black hole

Scientists have confirmed that there is an immense black hole at the centre of the Milky Way that forms a Galactic centre. These holes emerge when massive stars collapse and die. Black holes possess such a powerful gravitational pull that not even light can escape. Surrounding the black hole is an area known as an 'event horizon' which signifies a point of no return. The language scientists use to describe a black hole ('collapse', 'point of no return') points to death as an end-event. Black holes have also signified birth. One of the Mayan myths about the centre of the Milky Way describes it as darkened by dust and gasses. The Mayans did not know what caused the dark fissure or rift but they thought it resembled alligator jaws, which to them suggested a birthing womb. Hence they described the center of the Milky Way as a birthing place; here life was born from the jaws of the alligator, or a toothed abyss. Some writers and theorists argue that modern science has inadvertently created a new form of the abyss. In his book *Science Religion and the Meaning of Life,* Mark Vernon asks if evolution, science and modernity have killed God for all time.[10] If the answer is yes, then, he argues, that the death of religion will leave behind nothing but a void.

The abyss as destructive/creative whirlpool

In 1841 Edgar Allen Poe wrote a short story, *A Descent into the Maelstrom*, a tale about a man who survived a shipwreck and a whirlpool. The 1919 cover of his book was illustrated by Harry Clarke who represented the maelstrom as a massive black hole. Poe's tale is a story within a story told by an old man to the narrator. The old man tells of the fishing trip he embarked upon with two brothers. When they encounter a maelstrom the two brothers react very differently. One brother

is driven mad by the horror of the spectacle and drowns. The other brother sees the maelstrom as a beautiful and awesome creation. He clings on to a cylindrical barrel and is saved.

> Never shall I forget the sensations of awe, horror, and admiration with which I gazed about me. The boat appeared to be hanging, as if by magic, midway down, upon the interior surface of a funnel vast in circumference, prodigious in depth and whose perfectly smooth sides might have been mistaken for ebony, but for the bewildering rapidity with which they spun around...[11]

Poe's *A Descent into the Maelstrom* presents two opposing views of the dark, swirling whirlpool: in one it is a destructive space while in the other a terrifying but positive, regenerating space.

A number of artists have let the abyss fire their imagination creatively. Siberian artist Victor Lysakov in his painting *The Abyss* (2006), has responded to the concept of formlessness within the abyss and depicted the abyss as a free-floating space in which ghostly figures with blackened eye-sockets hover at the edges of the frame. J.M.W Turner explored the abyss in his painting, *Snow Storm: Steam-Boat off a Harbour's Mouth* (1842). Turner draws the viewer's eye into the centre of the scene where the storm swirls in a savage frenzy, suggesting various motifs from whirlpool to black hole. The painting seethes with energy and vitality. Edward Munch's *The Cry* or *The Scream* (1893) offers a powerful image of a personal abyss, characterised by existential anguish, which many at the time saw as central to the sensibility of the modern industrial era. The dominant use of dark wavy lines suggests loss of stability. The two men in top hats and coats, standing upright in the background represent civilisation; they are not aware of the terror perceived by the subject in the foreground. The open mouth of the androgynous figure on the bridge suggests an inner abyss, which is visually reinforced by the black swirling vortex to the right of the frame. Civilisation is fragile and it is threatened on all sides by the abject. It is thought that Munch was inspired by the sight of an erupting volcano—Mount Krakatoa. He wrote that as the sky turned blood red: 'I stood

there trembling with anxiety. I sensed an infinite scream passing through nature.'[12] In Munch's work the anguished cry seems to signify only the horror of the darkness within the self. Surrealist Rene Magritte's *The Flowers of the Abyss* (1928) depicts a dark world/womb where flowers look like floating spherical objects, which appear to be mechanised, even self-assembling. Here the abyss gives birth to a surreal imagination.

The cinema has always been fascinated with images of the abyss. In his classic film, *Vertigo* (1958), Alfred Hitchcock explored the abyss as a spiral which represented a deep hole, a vanishing point. Overcome by vertigo, the hero is in constant fear of falling into the abyss, which Hitchcock also associated with woman. To the hero, falling in love is akin to losing one's footing and falling to one's death. Hitchcock depicts the heroine as an eternal mystery, an unknowable and dangerous sexual other. She wears her hair coiled in a bun. In one scene she sits in an art gallery staring at a painting of another woman, who wears her hair in an identical bun. Hitchcock focuses on the black whorl of the bun, which seems to beckon ominously the hero. *Vertigo* depicts woman's sexuality as dark and mysterious—a potentially fatal abyss—which he must address if he is to experience love and passion.

In some schools of yoga the abyss is central to personal enlightenment. The individual must experience the abyss within before he or she can continue on their journey towards self-knowledge.

> Surrounding the second and the third chakra is the Void which stands for the principle of mastery (guru principle) within us. In many spiritual traditions, this area is the 'ocean of illusions' that needs to be crossed with the help of a spiritual guide. When the Kundalini is awakened and passes through the Void, this principle of mastery is established within us.[13]

Hegel refers to the unconscious workings of the subjective spirit as a 'nightlike abyss'. In his book on Hegel, *The Unconscious Abyss*, Jon Mills argues that Hegel anticipated Freudian psychoanalysis and its focus on the abyss within. To

Mills the, 'noctural' or unconscious abyss is 'an indispensible aspect of Hegel's philosophy'.[14] Mills conceptualises Hegel's abyss as signifying both death and life:

> There is a real horror of merging with the collective, for all individuality is annulled. This may truly be the double reality of the unconscious — the abyss is universal: in the soul and in Absolute Spirit, all particularity is annihilated. The abyss then becomes the face of death — pure negativity, nothingness. But it is precisely death that is the midwife of life.[15]

The abyss and woman's body.

Woman's body is associated with the abyss in both positive and negative ways. One of the most ancient representations of woman as black hole is the ancient Sheela-na-gig, from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a figurative carving found on churches and castles in Ireland and Britain. These carvings depict a woman pulling her labia apart to revel the entrance to the vagina, which appears as a large gaping maw. This was said to be so terrifying it could ward off death and evil. The popular superstition was that when woman shows the devil her vagina, he is terrified and runs away. In ancient times, soldiers painted images of a woman's vagina on their shields to frighten the enemy. In *Eros and the Abyss*, religious philosopher Grace Jantzen argues that the traditional association of women with the womb as abyss needs to be rethought:

> What I am suggesting is not a refutation of nihilism but a reconfiguration of its imagination. If the womb of the abyss is imagined not in misogynistic, hellish terms but rather in terms that value gender difference, embodiment, creativity and natality, then those aspects of the *Abgrund* which have been seen as implying the loss of all values are transformed into possibilities of new growth.[16]

Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1974-1979) is an installation artwork with dinner settings for thirty-nine mythical and famous women at a triangular table. It measured forty-eight feet on each side. Each woman was represented by a dinner

plate that was elaborately fashioned as a vulva symbol. In many settings the vagina is represented creatively as a flowering; in others, such as the Georgia O'Keefe and Elizabeth Blackwell plates, the suggestion of the vagina-as-abyss is both clear and confronting. In *The Monstrous-Feminine,* I explored the representation of woman in the horror film. Although woman is almost always aligned with the primeval black hole, her generative powers are also represented as simultaneously terrifying and empowering:

> What is common to all of these images of woman in discourses of horror is the voracious maw, the mysterious black hole which signifies female genitalia as a monstrous sign which threatens to … incorporate everything in its path. This is the generative archaic mother, constructed within patriarchal ideology as the primeval 'black hole, the originating womb which gives birth to all life.[17]

Kristeva: abjection and the abyss

In her book *Powers of Horror: Essays on Abjection* theorist Julia Kristeva draws a clear connection between the abyss and the abject. According to Kristeva, the abject is that which does not 'respect borders, positions, rules' that which 'disturbs identity, system, order'.[18] The place of the abject is 'the place where meaning collapses'—the abyss, the black hole.[19] The abject threatens the civilised and upright—it must be forcibly excluded from the place of the living subject, separated from the body and located on the other side of an imaginary border, which separates the self from that which undermines the self. Yet we need the abject precisely so we can define what it does mean to be human and civilised. Thus the abject—as with all taboo things—terrifies yet fascinates us. What kind of things are abject? In our culture, bodily wastes are particularly abject. The proper upright subject is taught to keep his or her body clean and separate from all bodily wastes such as blood, shit, urine, mucus and pus. The most abject thing of all is the corpse. Kristeva says:

> Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls

beyond the limit—cadere, cadaver (to fall). If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel. 'I' is expelled.[20]

The corpse is a waste. In this context death signifies a terrifying form of the abyss. Death is where the body loses its footing, falls from a proper and upright place into the abyss, a place without any borders or boundaries, which opens up to receive the body. The abyss is the grave—the black hole from which the body can never extricate itself. In death, the body loses all shape and definition, finally it becomes one with the earth, with the natural world.

In Kristeva's theory, nature and the animal are also abject things. Kristeva states: 'The body must bear no trace of its debt to nature…'[21] The proper civilised body should not signify the natural world. The human body of the civilised realm is upright, hairless, smooth, clean—there should be no trace of its animal origins, of the earth, of the struggle to survive. It is woman's body, however, that signifies the animal more than the male body. This is because of woman's closer ties with the animal world through the shared stages of reproduction. As with many female animals, woman is impregnated, her body changes shape, she gives birth, bleeds, lactates. Woman's bodily boundaries are more malleable, fluid and changeable— more abject. Does this mean that woman who is closer to nature, whose body is also represented as signifying the abyss is actually closer to, more intimately aligned, with the abyss?

Abjection and the artist

It is the role of the poet and artist, Kristeva says, to enter the abyss, and to confront the abject, in order to renew the social bond, to affirm self and civilisation. Does this mean that women artists explore the abyss differently from their male counterparts? Kristeva argues that, historically, it has been the function of religion to purify the abject but in modern secular societies, the work of purification is now the task of 'that catharsis par excellence called art'.[22]

> In a world in which the Other has collapsed; the aesthetic task—a descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct—amounts to retracing the fragile limits of the speaking being, closest to its dawn, to the bottomless 'primacy' constituted by primal repression.[23]

This is a crucial function of much art—purification of the abject through a 'descent into the foundations of the symbolic construct', through a descent into the abyss. Thus an encounter with abject things (bodily wastes, death, the corpse, cannibalism, animals) effects a renewal of the individual's sense of self and civilisation. Hence, the abject is essential to the process of defining and safeguarding what constitutes the self. The subject, constructed in/through art, through desire or meaning, is also spoken by the abject, the place of meaninglessness—thus, the subject is constantly drawn to the abject, the abyss, which fascinates but which must be repelled for fear of self-annihilation.

Abjection and animals

In his essay 'Why look at animals?', John Berger argues that in our attempt to differentiate ourselves from animals—partly in response to Descartes' theory that the non-human animal is a machine without reason and emotions—we have marginalised animals and isolated ourselves.[24] As Kelly Oliver writes, 'if we are capable of having only true encounters with other human beings, aren't we as John Berger might say, as a species alone in the world?'[25] Yet, Berger argues, we continue to seek that close relationship, 'the first circle' we once experienced with animals, which to a large extent has been destroyed by the advent of capitalism.

> The nineteenth century, in western Europe and North America saw the beginning of a process, today being completed by twentieth century corporate capitalism, by which every tradition which has previously mediated between man and nature was broken. Before this rupture, animals constituted the first circle of what surrounded man.[26]

He argues that as animals continue to disappear from daily

life we reinstate them in a variety of ways: as cultural objects, as captive in zoos, as pets, and on our television and cinema screens.

> Therein lies the ultimate consequence of their marginalisation. That look between animal and man, which may have played a crucial role in the development of human society, and which, in any case, all men had always lived until less than a century ago, has been extinguished.[27]

All animals, including ourselves, are creatures who are vulnerable in the face of death. If we believed that animals, like ourselves, also had a sense of the abyss, understood death, would we behave differently towards them?

The legend of 'The Elephant's Graveyard' holds that when an elephant realises that it is about to die, it separates itself from the group and sets out for a communal graveyard known only to the elephant world. There the elephant dies, surrounded by the bones of countless others of its kind. The elephant's graveyard is in fact a myth, first popularised in early films such as the *Tarzan* movies and the jungle adventure film, *Trader Horn*. The origin of the myth may well relate to the human fantasy of an El Dorado, a place of fabulous wealth such as a treasure trove of ivory. Yet it is also possible that we have constructed this myth because, deep down, we know that animals do understand the significance of death. We know for instance that elephants have death rituals.

In his book, *Elephant Destiny*, Martin Meredith recounts a typical elephant burial and mourning ritual that had been witnessed by Anthony Hall-Martin, a biologist who had researched elephants in South Africa for many years:

> The entire family of a dead matriarch, including her young calf, were all gently touching her body with their trunks, trying to lift her. The elephant herd were all rumbling loudly. The calf was observed to be weeping and made sounds that sounded like a scream, but then the entire herd fell incredibly silent. They then began to throw leaves and dirt over the body and broke off tree branches to cover her. They spent the next two days quietly standing over

her body. They sometimes had to leave to get water or food, but they would always return.[28]

There are many similar stories in which humans (rangers, explorers, zoologists) have witnessed elephants engaged in rituals of mourning while burying their dead. At the Munich Zoo, a herd of elephants were observed collectively mourning the loss of a 3-month-old baby calf named Lola. When the mother had finished saying goodbye, by laying her trunk on the baby's head, the other elephants lined up and took it in turn to lay their trunks on the baby's head. Is elephant mourning behaviour a simple reaction, or is it a response?

Elephants are regarded as one of most intelligent species on earth; their brain is very similar to that of the human brain in terms of makeup and complexity. It is thought they are equal in intelligence to cetaceans and primates. They have a wide variety of behaviours, including those associated with learning, play, altruism and a sense of humor, as well as compassion, cooperation and self-awareness. They also use tools. While high intelligence and the ability to express empathy may help to explain the elephant's ability to mourn for the dead, elephants are not alone in this regard. Other species have been observed to express emotions over the death of infants. At the Munster Zoo in Germany, an 11-year-old gorilla, Gana, would not relinquish her 3-month-old dead baby. She refused to abandon the baby, carrying it by her side for 24 hours before setting it down. Zookeepers were unable to retrieve the dead infant as she guarded it so vigilantly. Was she mourning? Scientists now say that, like elephants, chimpanzees appear to mourn their dead. Charles Choi explains how chimpanzees in a Scottish safari park responded to the last days of one of their group:

> Insights into how chimpanzees respond to the death of one of their own are rare. One such instance came with the final hours of Pansy, a chimp more that fifty years old. In the days leading up to the elderly chimp's peaceful demise in 2008, her group was very quiet and moved to sleep near her, the researchers found. Immediately before Pansy died, others groomed and caressed her often. One

male chimpanzee, Chippie, apparently tested her for signs of life as she died by closely inspecting her mouth and moving her limbs.[29]

Hippopotamuses have also been observed standing over the body of their dead baby for several days before leaving.

A recent event that took place in Santiago, Chile, demonstrates that some animals are both altruistic and aware of the meaning of death. The scene of a dog rescuing another dog on busy highway in Santiago was captured on a traffic camera overlooking the freeway. The rescue dog dragged its companion across lanes of traffic as cars swerved to avoid the two dogs. No motorists stopped to help. A highway crew eventually arrived and the dog was taken to the vet. What this demonstrates is that a dog will put itself in danger to rescue another from a certain death. One of the most famous rescue dogs in the Victorian era was known as 'Bob', a Newfoundland, who had been shipwrecked and took up outdoor residence on the London waterfront. Over the years he gained a reputation for saving people from drowning. Over a 14-year period he saved 23 people from the sea. Sir Edwin Landseer, the famous animal painter, painted Bob's portrait in oils. Bob sits on a quayside with the sea in the background. The painting garnered much public attention and was bequeathed to the Tate Collection. Bob was finally made 'A Distinguished Member of the Humane Society' in 1831, which entitled him to food and a medal for his bravery and services to humanity. Having been saved from a shipwreck, and certain death, Bob devoted his life to saving others in peril of drowning at sea.

The infamous story of Topsy, a four-ton African elephant from Forepaugh's Zoo on Coney Island, illustrates our own contradictory behaviour in relation to whether or not animals are sentient, express emotions and anticipate death. Thomas Edison made an early 60-second film of Topsy's death called *Electrocuting an Elephant* (1903). (Figure 25) It is available for viewing on the internet. Topsy, who performed for the zoo on Coney Island, had become increasingly aggressive and killed three of her trainers over a three-year period. When her last trainer tried to feed her a lighted cigarette, she crushed him. Officials decided to electrocute Topsy as punishment. They

25   Topsy falling over, from *Electrocuting an Elephant*, dir. T. Edison, 1903

decided electrocution, which had been used on humans since 1890, was more humane than being hanged. Besides, Thomas Edison wanted to demonstrate the superiority of his form of electricity known as the direct current over the new alternating current. In case the experiment didn't work, Topsy was also fed carrots laced with cyanide. A crowd of 1500 people paid to watch. Topsy was tied between two posts and wooden sandals with copper electrodes were attached to her feet and a copper wire run to Edison's electric light plant. A 6600-volt charge was pushed through her body. The film shows Topsy falling to the ground in a cloud of smoke. After the smoke clears we see that small spasms ripple through her massive body for up to twenty seconds. What did Topsy feel? Was there an instant when Topsy experienced a sense of fear or dread or when she anticipated or sensed her own death? The artist Sue Coe, in collaboration with writer Kim Stallwood created a series of works dedicated to Topsy. One is entitled *Thomas Edison Kills Topsy the Elephant to Promote the Electric Chair* (2007); it depicts Topsy chained to posts and lying on the ground as a crowd gathers in a circle to watch her execution. Coe emphasises Topsy's vulnerability, her huge body trussed and tied so tightly she is unable to move. The scene asks the viewer to wonder at the absurdity of a law that demands the brutal execution of an elephant who killed through no fault of her own.

Moussaieff and McCarthy cite the work of Cynthia Moss who studied wild African elephants for many years. She argues that elephants do have an understanding of their own death. Moss recounts a story told by R. Gordon Cummings, a nineteenth-century hunter in South Africa, who experienced difficulty in killing a large male elephant. He first shot it in the shoulder so that it couldn't run away. He then shot it a number of times in the head but with little effect. He then shot the elephant nine times behind the shoulder. Cummings said he wanted to end quickly 'the sufferings of the noble beast who bore his trials with such dignified composure'.[30] He wrote: 'Large tears now trickled from his eyes, which he slowly shut and opened; his colossal frame quivered compulsively, and falling on his side, he expired.'[31] Why do we have so much invested in denying that other animals understand death?

Why have we felt a need to claim death for ourselves — to make death a mystery, a religion, a sacred journey to a new life? What would happen if we accepted that animals also understand something about the meaning of death?

Artists, animals and death

In recent years a growing number of scholars such as Matthew Calarco have argued that the human-animal boundary should be problematised and ultimately disassembled.[32] In her book, *Creaturely Poetics,* Anat Pick argues for a 'creaturely approach' to human/animal relations based on a shared embodiedness, rather than a focus on the question of a shared subjectivity of human and non-human animals. Pick is interested in 'the corporeal reality of living bodies'.[33] Her work is inspired by Simone Weil's statement: 'The vulnerability of precious things is beautiful because vulnerability is a mark of existence.'[34] Pick argues that Weil's statement is the basis of 'a radical aesthetics and an equally radical ethics'.[35] Weil's concept that vulnerability is a 'mark of existence' applies to all living things, all of whom are vulnerable in the face of death. A growing number of artists in recent years have begun to explore the shared embodiedness and vulnerability of human and non-human animals. If their focus is on the bodies of animals it is because of the crucial need to undercut the anthropocentric point of view that dominates almost all intellectual discourse. Some artists emphasise the animal within the human as a way of interrogating anthropocentrism.

Janet Laurence's *Stilled Lives* (Figure 26) depicts a display case of dead, stuffed birds, all lying on their backs in a neatly organised row with labels attached to their bodies. The angle of the glass case creates the effect of an endless row of reflections of the dead. The birds are both still and stilled. The forlorn image of the dead bodies immediately recalls its opposite image: that of birds alive with movement and song. *Stilled Lives* reminds the viewer that museums collect dead creatures in order to stuff, preserve, classify, arrange and label them for display. Laurence's work offers a grim comment on the role of natural history museums that are simultaneously museums and vast graveyards of animals, which have been killed for the pleasure of the anthropocentric human gaze and the desire of

the human to classify and label the dead. How can we wander through any of the world's famous natural history museums, vast tombs for the creaturely dead, without asking ourselves what is it about the human animal that compulsively desires to gaze on the dead bodies of non-human animals? Why do we invest so much in the dead animals and not the living? *Stilled Lives* also reminds us that museums are undergoing significant change. As Libby Robin states:

> Animals taken originally for scientific purposes have, two centuries later, become part of an art movement that speaks to a new ethics for non-human others ... The transition of taxidermy specimen objects out of natural history and into art installation sheds light on the changing nature of museums. It also suggests that new ideas are emerging about the ethical responsibilities of people towards animals.[36]

Photographer Marian Drew uses her art to depict animals that have died on Australian roads, to draw attention to both the countless deaths of animals on the road and to the aesthetic and ethical conventions of the seventeenth-century Dutch still life genre. Drew arranges the dead animal on a table, set with napiery and cutlery, alongside fruit or ornamental objects as in *Kingfisher with Chinese Cloth and Strawberries* (2009) and *Bandicoot and Quince* (2006). Often the background offers a melancholy landscape. Drew arranges the dead bodies taking care to emphasise the beauty and vulnerability of the once wild, living creatures. Whereas the animals in the traditional still life were displayed to function as 'memento mori', that is, signifiers of our own mortality, Drew's haunting, uncanny images remind us of the deaths of others—the endless slaughter that takes place on our roads for which most people assume no ethical responsibility. The title of Drew's 2008 exhibition, 'Every Living Thing', emphasises the fragility and crucial importance of life to all living creatures—human and non-human alike. In *Crow with Salt* (2003) the dead bird lies on a china plate besides a spoonful of salt, two glass spoons filled with oil and vinegar, and a partially peeled lemon. Light suffuses the macabre scene giving the bird's black feathers a

26   Janet Laurence
      Stilled Lives, 2000

27   Sue Coe
      Selection for Slaughter, 1991

glossy sheen. The image of the crow (not normally regarded as food) recalls both the tradition of still life paintings (the creature displayed was there to be eaten) and Derrida's question: 'How does one respectfully eat the other?'[37]

Michael Zavros' painting, *Thoroughbred, Panthera Pardus* (2010) explores the idea of animals as trophies. His painting depicts a beautiful black horse standing alert with ears pricked. The spotted skin of a dead leopard, its jaws open wide, is draped across the back of the horse with its head resting on the horse's mane. This species of leopard, which once populated many countries across Africa and Asia, is thought to be extinct. The Arabian species is close to extinction. The horse and the panther convey the impression of being companions — it is as if the horse were conveying the panther to an afterlife. Zavros' work raises the theme of trophy hunting, that is, the selective hunting of wild animals, parts of which are kept as a souvenir or evidence of the hunter's prowess. Trophy hunting is responsible for the demise of a number of endangered species such as the African lion, the brown bear and the leopard. Trophy hunters of course seek the finest specimen, which affects the gene pool and causes a decline in the size and prowess of the population. In *Thoroughbred, Panthera Pardus* the leopard's skin and head is preserved. Trophies are usually displayed on a wall but here the animal's skin is carefully displayed across the back of the tall elegant horse. The thoroughbred appears to be alive but it too could be a stuffed specimen. This alignment of leopard and horse is strange, even uncanny in that the familiar is rendered unfamiliar. Zavros's painting suggests a future world in which the beautiful animal exists no longer in the wild, but only as an image, which the artist has carefully preserved.

Sue Coe's work on human and animal rights issues is known worldwide. Coe's work is radical and confrontational. Her illustrations of animals in slaughterhouses directly address the issues of animal cruelty and animal death. Despite the horrific nature of her subject matter she explores these issues with sensitivity and creativity. Her photo etching *Selection for the Slaughter* (1991) (Figure 27) depicts a room filled with animals each waiting their turn to face death. All have turned their backs to the scene in the room at the back

where slaughtered animals hang from hooks. Light falls on the body of a lamb whose turn has come. It stands looking into the room as one of the butchers grabs it by the ear to compel it forward. The three butchers are large able-bodied men: the lamb is small and vulnerable. Coe's illustration carefully draws the eye into the centre of the scene where light falls on the lamb's body as it awaits its fate. It is impossible to look at the scene without identifying with the lamb. In this way Coe asks us to consider the scene from the lamb's point of view, to identify with the lamb's fear which is rendered visible on the bodies and faces of the other sheep as they crowd together in the corner of the room, trying to escape the hand of the butcher. Coe's work is not easy to look at, yet it compels the viewer to look in detail. This is because Coe explores the issue of death from the animal's point of view. One particularly thoughtful work, *Man Followed by Ghosts of His Meat* (1990) depicts a man followed by all of the ghosts of the animals he has eaten—pigs, sheep, cattle, poultry. He stands outside a butcher's shop. A streetlight casts its rays on the group of animals who follow him like ghosts from a nightmare. The work conveys a strong impression that the man will never shake off these animals that he sees now as whole living creatures, not as pieces of meat. The idea that animals may return to haunt those who have eaten them is both sobering and darkly humorous. Coe's exhibition 'Sheep of Fools' (2005) explores the live transport industry in which thousands of live sheep are tightly packed into old freighters bound for ritual slaughter in the Middle East. The title was inspired by the sinking of a ship which was sailing from Australia to Jordan carrying sixty thousand sheep. The sheep either burned or drowned. One work depicts the sheep fighting for their lives in the water; another is a close-up of a sheep's face as it is sucked down into the abyss of black water, its eyes appearing as dark pools, against an image of the burning ship on the horizon.

In *The Young Family* (2002–03) (Figure 28), Patricia Piccinini explores the theme of animals and death from a very different perspective. The young family in question is an animal/human creature, a mother who lies on her side feeding her litter of babies. She has a recognisably human body but her face is porcine and her ears long and drooping. Her babies

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28 Patricia Piccinini
The Young Family, 2002

are in the foreground: two suckle at her breasts while a third rolls on its back looking up at its mother with an expression of love. The mother's face in turn is suffused with concern. She is worried about what will become of her babies whom she knows have been bred to supply organs for human use. In discussing genetic engineering, Piccinini has said: 'I believe that with creation—be it parenthood, genetic engineering or invention—comes an obligation to care for the result. If we choose to customise life then we must be prepared to embrace the outcomes.'[38]

Piccinini says the image is also about the animalness in us—what we share with the mother. Clearly, love is the most important emotion. The mother is filled with care and concern over what will happen to her children. What sort of responsibility do we bear to life forms we might create? What right do we have to breed other human/animal life forms in order to kill them for our own use? By representing the young family as animal/human hybrids Piccinini encourages us to identify with her and her concern for the lives of her offspring. In dismantling the human/animal boundary, Piccinini, and the other artists discussed, draw attention to the shared embodiedness and fragility of all creatures in life and in the face of death. They also explore the killing of animals as an atrocity.

The French philosopher Jacques Derrida has discussed the implications of the vulnerability of all animals in the face of death. To Derrida, the human animal has adopted various seemingly powerful measures to maintain the existence of a boundary between human and non-human animals. One of the most effective of these lines of demarcation is the view that animals do not understand the meaning of death or the darkness of the abyss. Derrida argues 'mortality resides there, as the most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals ... the anguish of this vulnerability and the vulnerability of this anguish'.[39] In his view, the animal is 'the absolute other' in human history. He argues that the 'most radical means of thinking the finitude that we share with animals' is to relinquish our power over them while acknowledging their vulnerability. Instead we should share 'the possibility of this nonpower'.[40] John Berger believes that

to rethink our relationship with animals in the modern era we have much to overcome. When animal and human now look at each other, Berger states, they stare across an 'abyss of non-comprehension'.[41] Yet there are many artists, writers and filmmakers who are committed to entering this abyss in order to establish a creaturely and ethical relationship with the earth's animals.

Notes

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5   Ibid, 27.
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7   J. Bentham, 'Limits of the penal branch of jurisprudence', *The Works of Jeremy Bentham* vol. 1 (London: Simpkin, Marshal & Co., 1843).
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9   J. Moussaieff and S. McCarthy, *When Elephants Weep: The Emotional Lives of Animals* (New York: Dell Publishing 1995), 95-6.
10   M. Vernon, *Science, Religion and the Meaning of Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
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The Nameless Shadowy Vortex: The Artist of Transition

Paul Carter

> *The nature of infinity is this! That every thing, has its*
> *Own Vortex; and when once a traveller thro' Eternity,*
> *Has pass'd that Vortex, he percieves it roll backward behind*
> *His path, into a globe itself infolding: like a sun:*
> *Or like a moon, or like a universe of starry majesty …*
> <div align="right">William Blake[1]</div>

'The Nameless Shadowy Vortex' was originally an improvisation performed at Artists' Week at the 2012 Adelaide Festival. The essay presented here is a further vortex spinning off the materials presented on that occasion. The parts of the essay, and the internal associative logic shaping each part, imitate in some way Blake's notion of successive vortices spinning backwards down the lifepath one has taken. The linear conventions of (scholarly) publishing are entirely different, implying a simple progress step by step towards illumination. Blake, by contrast, understood the merits of poetic involvement; like De Quincey, he recognised the structure of ideation as turbulent, characterised by a constant feedback between presented elements and the shape of thoughts to come. It is in this spirit that the brief for the artist of the transition is sketched. The endnotes appended to the essay reflect the character of the vortex: they spread out to embrace an unusually diverse range of literary references; at the same time, they draw these diverse universes of research rather abruptly into the path of the present whirling meditation. Some readers may find this style of allusion disconcerting: in its defence it can be said that further development of what Paul Valery might call this poetic 'system' would surely reveal yet other

associative universes underpinning the logic of this one. If this defence fails, the essay yet remains a faithful 'vortex street' drawn through the field of interests that have stretched back a quarter of a century, and which here achieve a kind of poise or meeting place, even if it is temporary and likely to roll backward very shortly.

I

If there can be multiverses, why not multiworlds? Intuitively, at least, we know that the world we inhabit, often identified as the Earth, consists of a multitude of life worlds: individuals pass through the mass of life that swarms across its surface touching but the tiniest part of its collective vitality. In whose name, then, do we insist on its limits, its finitude? Territorially speaking, the *earth* has measurable boundaries and area: but the *world* would appear to be something different, 'one infinite plane', according to William Blake, 'and not as apparent/ To the weak traveller confin'd beneath moony shade.'[2] From the context of this statement, a passage in the self-confessed 'Poem from immediate dictation', 'Milton', the weakness of the 'traveller' is imaginative.[3] In his mythological allegories Blake narrates the present condition of 'Albion' as a descent of 'Eternity' into the realms of time and space, characterised by a progressive corruption of 'The heavenly light with which the world is illuminated ... at all times.'[4] The decline is spiritual, marked by the rise of instrumental reason at the expense of poetic insight.[5] To be confined 'beneath moony shade' is a sign of the traveller's 'spiritual condition'. As the descent into the shadowy realm of the literal, the mechanical, and the materialistic is a symptom of 'inner' self-betrayal, the remedy must also be 'spiritual', not in a minor, Christian sense[6] but in the major sense of learning to become again 'the traveller thro' Eternity', an educative task Blake ascribes to the artist. The artist of the transition between this world and the next reverses the progressive enclosure of the soul, peeling back one onion skin of 'shade' after another towards the recovery of the eternal sun.

Shelley shared Blake's diagnosis of the malaise of contemporary English society—the world of the Industrial Revolution and the emergence of the 'second' British empire:

29   Edmund Carter
      Performing Water, 2011

We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know; we want the generous impulse to act that which we imagine; we want the poetry of life: our calculations have outrun conception; we have eaten more than we can digest. The cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world, has, for want of the poetical faculty, proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world; and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave.[7]

While Blake focuses on the vertical or psychological imprisonment of the soul and, even when moved by the horrors of the Caribbean slave colonies, transmutes historical events into a personal mythology of Paradise lost and regained, Shelley at least hints at the geographical impact of a want of 'creative faculty'. What are the implications, for example, for the white colonisation of Australia? If calculation — the endeavour of reducing Australia to a closed outline on a map — occurred at the expense of conception, what has been lost? What needs to be rediscovered? One could, in fact, begin the act of imaginative conceptualisation with a meditation on the name itself. A mythopoetic enquiry into the meaning of 'Australia' would discover a double orientation towards east and south, with a combined sense of *further towards the origin*.[8] Translated into psychological terms, this is the realm of hope.

The occasion of the remarks that lie behind this essay was an invitation to address the theme of 'Heaven and Hell', which, in the context of the exhibitions and themes of Artists' Week at the 2012 Adelaide Festival, was, I thought, an opportunity to reflect on the role of creativity in imagining the world differently. Instead of adorning the present received world of natural history documentary, geopolitical fiction and satellite imagery, the artist might undertake to reconfigure the world. A new poetic geography, for example, might single out the artist of the transition from this world to the next. If, in the anthropocene period, the survival of thinking depends on thinking differently about our relationship with the physical environment, the application of the 'creative faculty' to the imagination of the world has a profound practical implication. Following Blake, it would temper the rhetoric of sustainability,

whose vision of the future is a further decline of the present, with navigations of this world that enable us to imagine what we know: transition would involve a Blakean unfolding of the universal from the particular, an enlargement of the present to the boundaries of time and space. Such a development would do more than emancipate western slaves to the 'external world': it might harbour hope of wider reconciliation. I was struck by the words in artist Sandra Saunders's work, shown in the exhibition 'Deadly': 'when I die I will not go to your heaven above … I will go to mother Earth. We will be one again. That's my Heaven.'[9] Here, the inheritance of the Christian dualism taught (with disastrous spiritual and psychological consequences) at the mission is a temptation, it seems to me, to continue framing the good in terms of destructive oppositions: an otherwise inclusive indigenous conception of 'mother Earth' risks being essentialised, the heavens above traditionally integral to its constitution being subtracted as relics of colonial oppression.[10]

One way to materialise Blake's infinite plane is as a globe or sphere. In one sense closed (or finite), the sphere is also boundless and without starting point or finishing place. A spiralling trajectory across its surface might never return to its point of origin. However, from Blake's point of view, the distinction between the topology of the surface and the imagination of its progressive unfolding in the experience of the traveller through eternity is critical. For 'Objects such as the earth or the human heart, viewed from ordinary (fallen) perspectives, appear to be globes, folded in on themselves rather than infinite.'[11] In this case the role of the creative imagination is to unfold them, disclosing the infinity imprisoned with the finite — a task personified in the mythological figure of Los, 'the god of creative time who delivers man from the world of clock time, the poetic genius in man',[12] and whose name, as befits the divine hero charged with reversing the corruption of the eternal sun in matter, is Latin Sol (Sun) back to front.[13] And, borrowing from and adapting Descartes' vortical theory of cosmology, Blake imagines the reversal as a process of vortical formation: 'The nature of infinity is this! That every thing, has its/ Own Vortex; and when once a traveller thro Eternity,/ Has passd that Vortex, he percieves it roll backward

behind/His path, into a globe itself infolding: like a sun:/
Or like a moon, or like a universe of starry majesty.'[14]

So let's begin here—with the 'moony shade'.

II

Scientists using the European Southern Observatory's 'Very
Large Telescope' recently detected 'the telltale fingerprints
of organic life on Earth'.[15] Using a technique called spec-
tropolarimetry, they examined 'earthshine', the sunlight our
planet reflects onto the moon, and which much more faintly
the darkened portion of the new moon reflects back to earth.
Biological material, including elements associated with
life (oxygen, ozone, water) polarise the light they reflect. By
analysing the different spectra of polarised light detectable in
the moon's reflection of the earth's reflected sunlight, it was
possible to show the presence of a 'red edge' caused by surface
vegetation.[16] In addition, 'the unique homochirality of biol-
ogy',[17] the fact that the molecules of organic matter turn in one
direction rather than another, favouring 'one handedness over
another', was another, more generalised sign of life on earth.[18]
Naturally, the interest of these findings was not that they
revealed earthly 'biosignatures' but to provide a possible earth-
bound method for discovering signs of life on the surfaces of
'exosolar planets'.[19] Although the reflected albedo of the earth
is studied, the focus remains firmly on outer space and the
worlds beyond our worlds. To be sure, there is a theoretical
problem—how is 'biological' to be defined?—but the experi-
ment is hardly solipsistic. At the very least spectropolarimetry
brings us a step closer to detecting extraterrestrial life that has,
like ours, a carbon-based organic chemistry.

However, the ingenuity of the experiment is intriguing. If,
on the one hand, it displays a highly developed capacity for
logical inference, it also illustrates a kind of blindspot, or per-
haps tunnel vision, characteristic of scientific enquiry. True to
the 'return to Paradise' ethos of scientific thought and practice,
where the object is to 'correct appearances' with a view to
establishing certain universal axioms, the study of doubly
reflected light is itself entirely unreflective. Why, for example,
focus so much attention on a curiosity about life on exosolar
planets when the future of humanity depends on a better

understanding of, and care for, the earth's biodiversity? Why privilege evidence of clouds and water found in light reflected from the barren plains of the moon over a better (in depth) understanding of our oceans? If the discoveries made with the Very Large Telescope are another triumph for instrumentation, computation and interpretation, they are also evidence for how profoundly our scientific culture dwells, operationally and metaphorically, in the 'moony shade'. In an earlier epoch, at least, it did not have to be this way. In *Cosmos*, his great popular history of the evolution of human knowledge about the world and the universe, Wilhelm von Humboldt resisted the split between calculation and conception diagnosed by Shelley. His enthusiasm for the tropics was scientific *and* aesthetic: 'There the depths of the earth and the vaults of heaven display all the richness of their forms and the variety of their phenomena',[20] a declaration that implies a poetic, if not physical, connection and reciprocity between Heaven and Earth, above and below. However, just as Newton's Laws of Motion seemed to show that Descartes' cosmology of vortices was so much moonshine, so, nowadays, no one wins competitive research grants to develop a reflective science, let alone a spiritual one where 'the eye of man' might still view 'both the east & west encompassing/ Its vortex; and the north & south, with all their starry host'.[21]

The nature of the new cosmos, the one that discovers 'infinities' within the finitude of the human condition and maps these onto the common place, the world we share and where we aim to coexist, might begin with a reversal of perspective: instead of training a very large telescope on other planets and swimming among the 'starry host', it would consider how other worlds illuminate our own. It would stay with the enabling phenomenon of reflection and develop a reflective science, where the above illuminates what is below. The results of such an enquiry would not be a mirror image of positivist science—the simple exposure of another knowable region: it would need to factor in the shade as well as the moon, the darkness as well as the light. At this point a dark knowledge might start to emerge that marked a point of poetic departure from the neoplatonic genealogies of progressive spiritual decline and imaginative eclipse favoured by Blake and Swedenborg. 'Man turns away from God, just as the earth

turns away from the sun; and when he turns away from the truths of wisdom, he is like the earth turned away from the sun at night; and when he turns away from the goods of love, he is like the earth turned away from the sun in winter.'[22] Even if Swedenborg speaks figuratively here, he demonstrates a kind of poetic fundamentalism, a pseudo-scientific identification of the truth with the light that casts the shadow of night in the role of lack, loss and all 'the falsities of evil'.[23] The point is not that Swedenborg ignores rotatory reality but that his poetic firmament has no place for the world we live in. After all, in poetic geography night does not follow day any more than the horizons of either can be fixed or eliminated. While half the world sleeps, or wishes to dream, half the world energetically, tropically, greets the returning light. The spherical temporality of coexistence that characterises the rondure of worldly life is not an evacuation of Love: on the contrary, it is the signature of Eros—where, as Stanley Rosen writes, if 'the present is like a place, then it must be a place that we are always in'.[24]

A feature of this reflective world is what might be called its temporal chirality. In contrast with other worldly visions of the soul's journey through eternity, a world where knowledge is self-knowledge and is in touch with the dark and its unconscious powers and depths identifies the 'after life' with the life 'aft', or in the wake of passage. The before is after, a temporal ambiguity evident in these simple English words, but this does not mean that future and past are interchangeable, that time can be reversed. Time exhibits chirality or handed-ness: it goes one way rather than the other. The condition of Blake's statement, 'Thus is the heaven a vortex passd already, and the earth/ A vortex not yet pass'd', being true is that the vortices revolve in one direction not another: there is a spin to time. Meteorologists studying atmospheric turbulence can sometimes see 'vortex streets' forming down wind of mountains that break the clouds' flow. So with our lives: reflectiveness is not a state of calm tranquility, it introduces the unreachable and suspends the traveller like a bacchant between the dancers before and after and whose hands she holds. It is the creative passage but for which the terra firma axioms of Newtonian science would never revolve out of the main stream and slowing down grow calm and mirror like.

'His imagination felt itself struck by the representation of some ghosts who presented themselves to him and who so frightened him that, thinking he was walking down streets, he had to lean to his left side in order to be able to reach the place where he wanted to go, because he felt a great weakness on his right side, so that he could not hold himself upright. Because he was ashamed to walk in this way, he tried to straighten up, but he was buffeted by gusts that carried him off in a sort of whirlwind that spun him around three or four times on his left foot'.[25] So in a dream René Descartes experienced the dizziness of the creative vortex. Why, once out of the vortex street traversed, in the rational light of waking, did he put these perturbations behind him, announcing a new reflective science that, paradoxically, treated the world as uncertain and contingent in comparison with the truth claims of the cogito? The vortices came back in Descartes' cosmology, of course, but as attempts to reconcile the continuity of systems with their evident change.[26] Change happens when, for unknown reasons, an imbalance between centripetal and centrifugal forces occurs; but the bias of the hypothesis is towards a general, axiom-based theory of cosmological dynamics that produces an overall effect of self-sameness. If, as Leibniz wrote, 'It seems that there is some centre of the entire universe, and some general infinite vortex ...', then the vortex is hardly a figure of thought at all.[27] Like Einstein's curved time-space, it simply is: the torsion of becoming wrapped into the lining of Being.

However, for our reflective scientist and poetic geographer, this does not mean that it is etheric, unavailable to our sensory equipment. On the contrary: the infinite vortex is everywhere impacting on the line of thought. The resemblance between external volutes and internal ones is constantly brought before us, as we travel between horizons: in the before and after of life's toils, we are like Swinburne's persona in *The Triumph of Time*: 'In the change of years, in the coil of things,/ In the clamour and rumour of life to be ...'[28] Artists of the transition distinguish themselves from cartographers and photographers by their willingness to follow its arabesques to the (endless) end. In relation to turbulence, the vortex is the representation of change. It is the proof that ceaseless movement might have formal inclinations. The vortex is the image of transition. If

turbulence marks the inaugural moment of non-reversibility or simply history, then the vortex is what happens or takes place. Eddies are a state where the future is continually announced; their inconstant motion actualises power. These claims emerge when we pay attention to the volume of the vortex, its height and depth, the wobbling negative form of the conical volume it builds up, like a wavering pot emerging on the potter's wheel. For the 'inside' of the vortex is also its 'outside', its topology proprioceptive in a sense, exhibiting handedness, containment and the infinite, a reversibility that Blake grasps where he writes, 'There is an Outside spread Without, & an Outside spread Within/ Beyond the Outline of Identity both ways, which meet in One.'[29]

In the *Phaedo* Socrates' poetic geography locates humans not on the earth's surface, which he places amid the aether, but on its lower shore: 'we living inhabit the earth's hollow places'.[30] Etymologically, chaos is a term cognate with hollow. The yawning gap, in whose opening Eros moves to shape and distribute matter, separates sky from earth.[31] As the elements fly apart, the elemental traces of them migrate to their right places. These traces are, presumably, curvilinear, like the volume of the widening chasm. Pondering how it can be that the word *caelum* is applied to the earth (*loca infera*) and to the sky (*loca supera*), the Roman grammarian Varro guesses that a common quality was once ascribed to them. He notes the sky could have been called *caelum* either because it was *caelatum*, 'raised above the surface' or because it was *celatum*, hidden by night.[32] Either way, to explain the paradox, Varro guesses that both terms derive from *chaos*, from which 'came *choum* and then *cavum* "hollow", and from this *caelum* "sky", since, as I have said, "this around and above, which holds in its embrace the earth," is the *cavum coelum* "hollow sky"'.[33] The same principle applies when the word is used of the earth: 'from *cavum* "hollow" come *cavea* "cavity" ... *cavernae* "caverns" etc.' The word *cavum* was also applied to the spectators' part of the theatre; it also meant 'stall, bird-cage, bee-hive'.[34] The hollow is, in this sense, the place where the ground is materialised—where place spins into being, perhaps in the pirouette of two people approaching as if to meet. Knowledge of this place is dark knowledge: pursued, it leads to a geography of

the underworld. Pythagoras is supposed to have held the view that Hades was none other than the reality that no one has ever seen and is without form.[35] He is also said to have arrived in Italy via a journey through the underworld, a story that has been linked to a year spirit Bear Cult—the hibernating bear is imagined descending each winter to the moist gloom of the underworld, and returning thence with strange wisdom. In any case, the point is that, contra Descartes, Pythagoras was a student of the formless hollow: he 'looked for instruction in the circling stars and circulating winds and spiralling eddies in the muddy currents of the Meander'.[36] Unlike Swedenborg, Pythagoras saw value in the sun at night and the sun in winter.

Another personification of the bear may be the folk hero on which Homer's Odysseus is based. The name 'Odysseus' is cognate with Otis, meaning 'Big Ears', apparently with reference to the bear's ears; and Odysseus' seven-year imprisonment in the *loca infera* of the nymph Calypso's cave humanises another seasonal myth. The presiding deity of reflective knowledge is indeed Calypso, whose name means 'covered' or 'hidden' and is related to the Etruscan god of the dead and the underworld, Kalu, in turn associated with the root for the hidden, *kel*—cache—or Hel.[37] The verb *kalypto* means to dissimulate or wrap up the meaning so that it shines through obscurely—a challenge to the reflective hermeneut—and, in their attitude towards the communication of knowledge, Calypso and Hermes are close kin. Both believe that 'Truth is the mirror, not what's in it or behind it, but the very mirroring process itself.'[38] Environmentally, Calypso is associated with hollows of all kinds—with covering—cloud cover, canopies and roofs; she is the patron of what is concealed and lies behind or beneath the surface, which, ambiguously, she both protects and obliterates. She buries to resurrect, offering Odysseus immortality if he stays. The geographical location that corresponds best to Calypso's homeland is not a coastal grotto in Puglia but Australia, the continent that, from a northern mythopoetic perspective, lies constitutionally beyond the horizon in the underworld. It was poetic fate not botanical observation that caused Australia's most characteristic vegetation to be named by the newcomers *eucalyptus*, the well-covered. Had they not hoped to find a new home beneath

its canopy, they would not have rued the failure of its pendent leaves to shade them from the burning sun.

III

The earth's albedo varies according to the reflectance properties of its different surfaces: water has low albedo, snow high; clouds reflect a middling amount of light. If you did not know that the earth is a partially cloud-covered body composed of land and sea, taking the different albedo readings at face value, you might imagine it as a mottled and discontinuous body, a patchwork of regions distinguished by their different reflective properties. A reflective planet looked at in this way would suggest an archipelago of environments. Such an effect would not be solely due to different reflectance levels: it would also be influenced by the sunlight's angle of incidence with the earth's surface. The earth's albedo starts to look archipelagic, or patchy at least, because of the earth's rondure: at any time some equatorial parts of the hemisphere facing the sun lie at nearly ninety degrees to the direction of the sun's light, the earth's curvature causing the angle of incidence to diminish thence in all directions. In any case, it is not too far-fetched to say that a reflective geography could derive some support for its different conception of the earth from modern astronomy. The object would not be to dispute the material structure of the *earth* but to indicate a *world* there that science ignores, an infinity wrapped up in the globe that emerges when the earth's topology is taken into account and the complexity of its phenomenological appearance granted status as a way of knowing, even navigating, the cosmos. Clouds, oceans and river systems display traces of complex, vortical modes of coming into being and dying away. The fractal complexity of their (self-) organisation, disregarded for the purposes of detecting biosignatures in outer space, are finger prints of a cosmos within, 'an Outside spread Within/ Beyond the Outline of Identity'.

A poetic geography, one that seeks to outline a new conception of the world, understands the earth as a relational figure: the algorithm of relationality, one might say, is its rondure, the fact that all parts connect to all parts, a multiplicity of horizons—Blake's 'the rising sun & setting moon he

views surrounding/ His corn-fields and his valleys of five hundred acres square' (to continue quoting from the passage on the 'Vortex' in 'Milton')[39] — co-existing with unity — 'the earth one infinite plane'. Local regions are related to one another through the mechanism of the vortex. The vortices of self-becoming not only hollow out places: they link these trembling volumes one to another. Blake's view of this indigenous creativity, able and willing to go on creating in the 'moony shade' may have been ambiguous. For the Romantic imagination, self-consciousness imitates cosmic genealogy: its dialectical vertigo recapitulates the Empedoclean dynamics of physical creation, poised between centrifugal Strife and centripetal Love. 'The nameless shadowy vortex' that seduces Los in *The Four Zoas* is an expression of the 'shadowy female', 'this material world, a fallen form of Vala'.[40] (Vala is Nature.) However, she is also 'the voice of the Darwinian world, the struggle for life ... in the vision of the birth of Jesus, she sees her future salvation, her apocatastasis'.[41] Los 'is Poetry, the expression in this world of the creative Imagination'; he creates Golgonooza, the city of art. 'Los creates the lines of poet-prophets who destroy the kings. He is the spiritual revolutionist, whose son Orc is outward revolution.'[42] In other words the vortex is not only a dramatic image of descent into the maelstrom of the material world — a trajectory that no artist can by-pass — it is also an image of resurrection, of evolutionary ascent. In Swedenborg's spiritual architecture angels ascend and descend by way of spiral staircases.

The vortex of *The Four Zoas* is shadowy because it seduces Los from his spiritual purpose, betraying him into the path of literal, sexual reproduction. But why is the vortex 'nameless'? Perhaps, as Blake's view of the vortex is ambiguous, we can imagine that the epithet is not applied negatively but in recognition of a dark potentiality, something we might call the creative region, a place always to the south and east of what can be named, possessed and mastered. Such an interpretation conjures up Giorgio Agamben's discussion of a pure power of saying that does not convey a general form of knowledge or law but:

acts in its own weakness ... That this potentiality finds its

telos in weakness means that it does not simply remain suspended in infinite deferral; rather, turning back to itself, it fulfils and deactivates the very excess of signification over every signified, it extinguishes languages … In this way, it bears witness to what, unexpressed and insignificant, remains in use forever near the word.[43]

Nearness, a constitution that is doubled or multiplied, that finds its being interstitially, in the relative movement of parts, is the affective or social dimension of vortical dwelling. The centri-petal/-fugal tension of the turning figure creates the distance essential for coexistence.

In a similar vein, Stanley Rosen argues that 'the present … is produced by the erotic (or caring) production of a cosmos (or world)'.[44] Thus, with reference to the 'present' as 'a place that we are always in', Rosen suggests that temporality originates in Heidegger's *Sorge* (care or concern) or Platonic Eros.[45] That is, we can coexist because we are inclined towards one another—whirled together. In this erotic formulation of the whirling *turba* (Latin for 'crowd'), the 'present' becomes possible through 'being by or next to'.[46] A 'rank-ordering' is involved. 'We produce the lived present, not as a synthesis of temporal points, but as the self-orientation of erotic striving'.[47] Eros in this formulation is an intentionality not directed towards this or that object, but generally: 'In Heideggerian jargon, it is the opening of the horizon of the world'.[48] And Rosen explains that the 'opening' is 'neither the present, the past, nor the future [but] the founding of the presence as the atemporal condition that makes possible the articulation of past, present, and future'.[49] Translated into political terms, the vortex of the place we are always in is a state of tremulous potentiality or teetering towards stability than cannot be legislated but must be taken on trust. Its constitution is inseparable from the conduct involved in its continuous production. Hence, Hannah Arendt explains the emergence of the public domain as a creative region:

[In t]he venture into the public realm … one exposes oneself to the light of the public … Speaking is also a form of action … we start something. We weave our strand

into a network of relations … this venture is only possible when there is trust in people. A trust—which is difficult to formulate but fundamental—in what is human in all people.[50]

In this new world of becoming at that place, the pastoral image of Paradise—self-contained, changeless and shadow-less—which finds its mechanical counterpart in the internally consistent movements of the clock—is replaced by the continuous production of relations through the vortex. Hesiod located 'the islands of the blessed' 'near the ocean's deep swirl',[51] a mighty whirlpool which has its Norse counterpart in the story of the origin of the maelstrom (mill stream): to explain the precession of the equinoxes, it was supposed that the original earth was composed of two hemispheres (or millstones) that turned in opposite directions on a vertical spindle. However, when the millstones were wickedly stolen and Amlodi, the mythological original of Shakespeare's Hamlet, forced the thieves to give them up, the millstones dropped into the sea, a whirlpool forming where water gushed through the spindle hole. 'The unhinging of the Mill is caused by the shifting of the world axis',[52] and, as the Shakespearean sequel indicates, it raises the question of how disorder will be righted. The point is that creative regions are likely to be found in the neighbourhood of turbulence. They give credence to the idea that 'a theory of chaos and ordered turbulence' is not only plausible in the physical sciences but might be a core component of the political systems associated with the poetic geography of the archipelago. However, to advance this theory, 'chaos' would have to retrieve its ancient Greek meaning, of fertile opening, multiplying hollow, producer of change. For the vortex is not a fixed location in space and time but rather the event of space and time fusing, a process that throws off one vortex after another, before and aft.

In relational geography a new kind of time is imagined that involves us, carries us up in its eddies and transports us from one place to another. But what counts is the *pre-creation* of the new, stable vortex, the gathering process, the preceding insta-bility, the initial weakness of the system that allows teetering to occur. Toiling across the central plains of Victoria during

drought, the naturalist Thomas Belt noticed the phenomenon known locally as the 'willy-willy':

> it was seen that as soon as one was formed, the air immediately next the heated soil, which was before motionless, or quivering as over a furnace, was moving in all directions towards the apex of the dust-column. As these currents approached the whirlwind, they quickened and carried with them loose dust and leaves into the spiral whirl.[53]

Belt concluded, against the received view, that hot air did not always immediately rise; instead it might form a heated stratum immediately above the ground 'in a state of unstable equilibrium': 'This continued until the heated stratum was able, at some point where the ground favoured a comparatively greater accumulation of heat, to break through the overlying strata of air, and force its way upwards.'[54] The force necessary to make this sudden, violent passage, to drive the air upwards, was in embryonic form the same that drove the cyclone's violent revolution. Here is a physical observation that illuminates the distinction between creative and destructive chaos, between two phases of the phenomenon. It suggests a communicated tension or readiness; a neighbourhood of watchfulness.

Transposed to the human domain, the prechaotic state of unstable equilibrium recalls Freud's description of the agitation of the preconscious as it wanders this way and that looking for the right associative path. In my book *The Lie of the Land*, a book itself organised vortically allowing historical events apparently remote in time and space to be related poetically, according to common compositional principles, some cultural instances are given of this disposition to entertain turbulence as a precursor of transition to a new and more complex order. Belt's discussion of winds naturally recalls Roger Ascham's extraordinary description of the flakes of snow, which, although falling, sometime ran round about in a compass—an observation that should remind the new toxophilist that he always fired his arrow into a turbulent medium.[55] It also recalls those ambiguous spells in Central Australia where, as one Arrernte rainmaker told the anthropologist

T.G.H. Strehlow, 'Our clouds are still wandering about: they are going north, south, east, and west.'[56] From the point of view of the Positivist storm these uneventful phases signify drought; from another perspective they are periods of creative vagrancy when a variety of possibilities open up and, leaving the high road of linear reason, we entertain the other compass points of poeisis or, better, give up horizons to concentrate on the great cracks where the heated air shimmers and which, from the perspective of relationality, are the joins of an archipelago of plates.

It's obvious that in this new reflective world the ocean assumes a new importance. It is the relating medium par excellence, the incubator of nature's most spectacular vortices; and, in fact, considered as a total body, comprising the globe's entire humid system, it can be said to replace land-based conceptions of the earth entirely. Describing an integrated system of flux, Michel Serres refers to a 'living syrrhesis' that:

> combines sea and islands. In a completely new sense, the organism is synchronous for meanings and directions, for the continuous and discontinuous, for the local and the global; it combines memory, invariance, plan, message, loss, redundancy, and so forth. It is old, mortal, and the transmitter of a new cycle. The organism is fixed on top of a temporal converter—no, *it is a converter of time.* This is perhaps why it is able to learn about systems differentiated by their individual time: the world, fire, and signs.[57]

In terms of a poetic geography, this can be understood as a new kind of archipelago. In his poetic history of the Mediterranean, Matvejevic writes: 'One trait most islands share is the anticipation of things to come: even the smallest looks forward to the next boat, to the news it will bring, to some scene, some event.'[58] But this might not be a peculiarity confined to individual islands: it might define the engine of desire that orders the archipelago as a whole, so that, following Serres, it does not represent a creative region so much as produce it, the intervals between islands being converters of time and space, synchronous and polyhedral—just as the earth considered as a sphere is composed wholly of horizons.

To discover an archipelago that corresponded to this new world, it is necessary, though, to sail beyond the Pillars of Hercules—to the West Indies, of course, which Edouardo Glissant has reimagined so powerfully—but also, with our further east and south bias in mind, to the East Indies. A typology or archipelagos is outside the scope of this essay. It would begin, though, with a contrast between the musically organised and choreographed Cyclades and their Mediterranean antithesis, the Sporades, which seem to lie at the limits of what can be identified as a region of common interests. Entering the Atlantic, it would turn northwards first, steering away from the maelstrom into the Baltic, where it would discover that there exists in Finnish the word 'Saaristoinen' meaning 'an area with many archipelagos'.[59] In Finnish archipelago consciousness the islomane evoked by Laurence Durrell,[60] who is free of any desire for other places, is unimaginable: 'close connection with the sea is the minimum condition of an archipelago'—'I know myself that you must have the feeling that you can take a rowboat and row even to China from your own seashore, it is not necessary to see the water, but you must know that it is there, and you should preferably also be able to see it.'[61] Which fantasy leads directly to the early European conceptions of what Marco Polo referred to with a characteristic confusion of poetic conception with scientific calculation when he reported 'Beyond the China Sea there are 7,448 islands. No one has ever seen them all.'[62]

Humboldt speculated that the universe consisted of 'innumerable systems scattered like islands through the immensity of space, and each composed of a sun and a moon'.[63] In that case their earthly counterpart is the combined island swarms of the Indonesian and Philippine archipelagos. There is a chapter to be written about the distinctive style Portuguese cartographers used to represent this multitude without edge. Here one feature can be mentioned as typical of the 'opening to the horizon' that these non-Mediterranean arrangements inspired: the representation of the islands as open figures composed of passages. In the Homem chart, for example, it is harbours, river entrances and other locations of passage that are marked. Without continuous coastlines to differentiate land masses from navigational channels, it is a

genuine syrrhesis that is depicted, where islands and ocean interpenetrate, and the principle of relationality subsumes land/water distinctions to produce a counter-intuitive outcome: the proliferation of limitless connections. It would be interesting (and it is overdue) to relate Australia's coming into being from this direction: from a south-east Asian, archipelagic sense of place, Australia might be conceived as the extension of the archipelago, not a territorial calculation to be bounded and separated but as an endless enlargement of the region of care. Instead of starting in 1770 or 1788, it would enjoy an archipelagic temporality, infolded in the 'present' that becomes possible through 'being by or next to'.

IV

The artist of the transition helps us to navigate the earth so that we can imagine the world we already know. But what skills are needed to assume this role? Is the cartographer of the new cosmos a kind of geographical cybernaut, negotiating the whirlpools caused by the constantly forming and reforming relational state of things? Or a psychopompos of the surface, leading us to an underworld that belongs entirely to the world of light, despite the fact that, in the European myth, it lay in darkness until its discovery? One thing is fairly obvious: our companion will have to be a diver. This is not the place to attempt a cultural history of diving, but, if we did, it would be a relatively short one. In comparison with the amphibious focus of life in non-European, archipelagic communities, life in the European peninsula has traditionally been landbound. Philosophies of standing predominate and coastal and offshore environments are regarded as foreign to social and political stability. Even swimming seems to have been a relatively recent interest. Exceptionally, Theseus dives to the bottom of the sea[64] but, generally, the above and the below, and the transition between these, which Heraclitus famously regarded as two aspects of each other, have been interpreted metaphorically, in terms of intellectual aspiration. Instead of diving, most scenarios of transition describe falling. In fact, blackout or syncope is almost a signature of the second birth needed to discover one's vocation.

   In this context the significance of the dive in initiating us

30   William Blake
Newton, 1795/c.1805

into the new world of turbulence might be best approached through another Blake connection: his famous engraving of Isaac Newton, seated naked on a rock and leaning forward to ponder his own invention (the calculus), whose geometrical calculation appears in the diagram inscribed on the scroll rolling out from under his feet. (Figure 30) For the odd thing about this image is that it draws the great mathematician at the bottom of the sea. Because of slighting references to Newton elsewhere in Blake's oeuvre, there is tradition of interpreting this image ironically — as an illustration of a kind of mechanistic reasoning so absorbed in its own logic that it is deaf and blind to the sensuous world and, indeed, to the invisible medium of the spirit that supports us everywhere. But the idealisation of the naked figure as a kind of god is clearly against this view. W.J.T. Mitchell is surely right when he writes:

> Everything we know about the 'doctrinal' Blake would lead us to expect the great codifier of Natural Law and reason to be presented as a patriarch with his writings inscribed in books and tablets. Blake presents him instead as a youthful, energetic scribe whose writings take the form (perhaps unintentionally) of a prophecy. This is the Newton, not of 'single vision' and 'sleep', but the 'mighty Spirit from the land of Albion/ Nam'd Newton' who 'siez'd the Trump, & blow'd the enormous blast!' that awakes the dead to judgment. Or, perhaps more accurately, it is the Newton whose 'single vision' is so intensely concentrated that it opens a vortex in his own closed universe, a figure of reason finding its own limit and opening into imagination.[65]

As Mitchell intuits, Blake's Newton has threaded the passage between the 'closed universe' of reason and 'the opening to the horizon of the world' available to the imagination. He has passed from a closed universe characterised by universal laws that insist on the self-sameness of the physical world throughout time and space into an open world where to imagine what we know is to participate in the endless dialectic of becoming, to be pivoted between the present and future

appearance of things, and hence to be the prophet of their unfolding. To achieve this transition is not simply to open a vortex: it is to pass successfully through its vortex in the new world, a task for the skilful diver. Traditionally, the vortex is a favoured figure of creativity, but this begs the question of how one becomes creative and manages the turbulence of changing the world. In the Vorticist manifesto, Ezra Pound called the vortex 'the locus of maximum energy', describing 'the artist DIRECTING a certain fluid force against circumstance' and the poem as 'the statement that has not yet spent itself in expression, but which is the most capable of expressing ... The DESIGN of the future in the grip of the human vortex.'[66] The artist of the vortex, then, is the one who successfully embodies the imagination: the 'expression' is the analog of his 'fluid force'. However, the verbal artist at least has to get his materials from somewhere, otherwise the vortex remains conceptual and inoperable. When the Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa declared that his soul was a 'black maelstrom, a vast vertigo around a vacuum. (I am, he insists, 'the centre that doesn't exist except as a convention of geometry of the abyss; I am the nothingness around which this movement spins'), he also explained that round this black hole spin the *membra disiecta* of his life, 'houses, faces, books, boxes, musical refrains, and isolated syllables, in a sinister, bottomless whirl'.[67]

Obviously this is the style of Pound's *Cantos*, a helter-skelter, cinematic presentation of 'scenes' of seemingly endless cultural and personal *membra disiecta* arranged into free-flowing bundles whose montage, in turn, recalls the way that Walter Benjamin organised the contents of the *Arcades Project* into twenty-six alphabetically designated 'convolutes' (literally 'bundles') or folders, thematically defined by various *objects ... topics ... figures ... authors*.[68] Tomlins attributes this vortical system of organising matter to Benjamin's encounter with the author of the statement we quoted before ('It seems that there is some centre of the entire universe, and some general infinite vortex'): 'Benjamin developed the concept of constellation, which he also earlier called convolution, in the course of a multifaceted intellectual encounter with Leibniz.'[69] In his translator's foreword to Gilles Deleuze's famous disquisition upon Leibniz, *The Fold*, Tom Conley calls

Leibniz 'the first great philosopher of the pleat, of curves and twisting surfaces'.[70] Convolution expresses time precisely in this fashion: folded, coiled, twisted; time not straight and sequential, endless extension, but sinuous, wound back on itself. Time, that is, expressed in the way that life itself is lived and recalled. Benjamin gives voice to the idea of convolution in his 1929 essay on Marcel Proust, whose massive memoir *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu* is famously launched from a fold of pastry—a 'petite madeleine—that is simultaneously a fold of time'.[71] So it is no accident that the other inventor of the calculus, Newton, is, in Blake's engraving, working on the problem of calculating where the finite and the infinite meet and the area that the curve and the tangent then enclose or perhaps disclose.

More sedately and reflectively, the poet Paul Valery recognises the independent role the dynamics of the vortex play in imaginative formations. As the figure of the imagination the vortex represents the force of attraction or the power of identification from which poetry springs. Thus the 'secret [of poetic works] ... lies and can only lie in the relations they found—and were compelled to find—among things of which we cannot grasp the law of continuity'.[72] In Valery's theory, 'The faculty of identification' ('there is nothing more powerful in the imaginative life') seizes upon its theme, whereupon 'The chosen object becomes as it were the centre of that life, a centre of ever multiplying associations, depending on whether the object is more or less complicated.'[73] Here an initial centripetal force of attraction produces its counterforce, a centrifugal force that spreads out engulfing a growing region of matter and absorbing it into the world of the poem. This process of expansion and absorption should not be imagined as occurring in flat space, as if the poet was engaged in a campaign of territorial conquest. It occurs on a Riemannian surface, for the poetry of the Symbolists, and of Mallarmé in particular, does not become clearer as it expands. On the contrary, it folds more and more into itself, revelation being inseparable from re-veiling. The Symbolist poem is a genuine act of world-making, one that takes into account the rondure of this worldly reality. Think of each image in a Symbolist poem as a plate in a coat of chain mail; and imagine the coat

as spherical. Each image stands at an angle to its received definition, and occupies its own plane, so that neighbouring images have distinct horizons. The logic of the poem can only be grasped by navigating it: there is no end to its horizons, and the reader-sailor never achieves a circumnavigation that produces a complete picture. Instead the path is helical, endless, continuously unfolding across discontinuities.

The artist of the transition steers into the maelstrom, mapping it as well as navigating it. The vortex is not only what is imagined: it is the structure of the imagination itself. Pessoa may compare the state of his soul to a 'nothingness' but it clearly has a structure: it is a hollow, a conical *involute* 'around which this movement spins', and the form the hollow assumes is the offspring of the physical laws governing the unstable equilibrium of the whirling. The term 'involute' comes from Thomas De Quincey's account of the nature of memory in his essay *Suspiria in profundis*.[74] Pessoa's state of 'nothingness' recalls the one De Quincey describes when what he calls 'the organising principles' fail: 'In parts and fractions eternal creations are carried on, but the nexus is wanting, and life and the central principle, which should bind together all the parts at the centre, with all its radiations to the circumference, are wanting. Infinite incoherence, ropes of sand, gloomy incapacity of vital persuasion by some one plastic principle ...'[75] When they work, though, the 'organising principles' find a pattern in mental data 'which by pure accident have consecutively occupied the roll'.[76] De Quincey's parchment, and the palimpsestic traces it bears, is imagined as a roll or convolute in Benjamin's sense and, when they succeed, the 'organising principles' produce 'involutes'—'far more of our deepest thoughts and feelings pass to us through perplexed combinations of *concrete* objects, pass to us as *involutes* (if I may coin that word) in compound experiences incapable of being disentangled, than ever reach us *directly*, and in their own abstract states'.[77]

The term 'involute' itself comes from the technical vocabulary of what used to be called conchology, the science of shell classification. Early nineteenth-century handbooks of conchology describe an astonishing variety of shell forms; and the equally astonishing poetic inventiveness of the names used to classify these is remarkable for its attempt to capture

the architecture of the hollow itself, the winding internal volume of the shell rather than its external appearance. It is interesting that the author of *Descent into the Maelstrom* also arranged the contents of *The Conchologist's First Book*. In his introduction, Poe makes the point that shells have a privileged place in geognosy because they bridge the organic and inorganic worlds, belonging equally to biology and geology. His lexicon evokes an architecture of the hollow: 'Pillar, or columella, is that process which runs through the centre of the shell in the inside from the base to the apex of most univalve shell, and appears to be the support of the spire.'[78] The 'Spire consists of all the whorls of the shell, except the lower one ... termed the body of the shell'.[79] 'Whorl is one of the wreaths or volutions of the shell.'[80] An 'involuted spire' refers to 'those shells which have their whorls, or wreaths, concealed in the inside of the first whorl or body, as in some of the Nautili and Cypraea'.[81]

It has occurred to me that De Quincey was critically selective in his choice of the term 'involute', that he wanted to distinguish the way *his* imagination was structured from the topology it might exhibit in other individuals. In fact, you could imagine different mental structures of memory resembling different species of the five genera of columel-laria—which, in general, exhibit a 'Thick, turbinated, with a short obtuse spire.'[82] The 'first whorls of the spire' of the genus Voluta are 'rounded into a teat'; and 'the columellar edge' is 'garnished with large folds more or less oblique, and slightly varying in number with age'.[83] The genus Volvaria has a shell that is 'Cylindrical, convolute; spire obsolete or concealed; aperture narrow, extending the whole length of the shell ...'[84] The shell of the Cyprea genus of the Convoluta family is 'Oval, convex, very smooth, involute' and the 'spire entirely posterior ...'[85] (The glossary defines 'involute' as 'without a spire'.)[86] Of this, 118 species are recorded. In any case, whatever the merit of this fantasy, it reminds us that when Valery imagines 'the faculty of identification' encasing the 'centre of that life' in 'ever multiplying associations',[87] he describes a distinct and fateful architecture that recalls the formation of shells. 'The majority of gastropod species (over 90 per cent) have dextral (right-handed) shells in their coiling, but a small minority of

species and genera are virtually always sinistral (left-handed). A very few species (for example *Amphidromus perversus*) show an even mixture of dextral and sinistral individuals.'[88] Perhaps in a comparable way poems also exhibit chirality, the 'handedness' of their volume integral to the unfolding of the sense.

In this case the hollow of the shell is 'the Trump' the prophet blows and the sound of 'the enormous blast' will be an atmospheric turbulence that resounds with the physical volume whence it emanates. While the generation of audible turbulence, that is, noise, in the vocal tract is necessary for the production of fricatives, the fricative release of affricates and the burst of stops, audible turbulence may also be associated with the production of vowels and sonorants in certain conditions. There is some degree of low-level air flow turbulence even for the most open of speech sounds—something we might perceive as breathiness. The fundamental identity of physiology, pneumatology and psychology has suggested to Bachelard the idea that, ultimately, breath patterns structure the world, a notion analogous to Descartes' theory of vortices. In a meditation on the aerial imagination, Bachelard refers circumspectly to Charles Nodier's theory of 'mimologism' (advanced in his *Critique of French Dictionaries*, 1828), according to which the origin of a word resides in 'the whole group of oral and respiratory conditions that must be discovered by physiognomic imitation of facial expressions as we speak'.[89] The etymologist of the vocal organs discovers the phonetic history of a word recapitulated each time it is sounded out. Bachelard locates the mimicry elsewhere, not in the act of articulation but in the '*mimologism of total breathing*'.[90] On this basis, the aerial imagination manifests itself in a kind of breath speech—'Let us make no noise but our breathing, taking only shallow breaths—let us imagine only those words that form as we breathe'.[91] 'The pneumatology of lines' dictated by breath 'would be expressed as a volume'[92]—an idea Mary Le Cron Foster takes up when she speculates that language may have originated in a process 'by means of which states and movements in space [were] translated into spatiosonant, articulatory counterparts'.[93] Instead of listening and repeating the numbers lisped by nature, the first speakers, according to Foster, physically imitated the valleys, paths, groves, rocks

and grottos. Shaping mouth, lips, tongue and vocal tract in imitation of external states and movements, they produced the vocal equivalents of those places.

Did you think that the diver's training consisted of successive plunges into the millstream of life, that his and her skills were the sole result of learning to be out of his depth? These skills the anchorites[94] of the deep learn 'on the job': no, the question addressed to her is curricular. What is the mental equipment the diver needs to thread the eye of the whirlpool and plumb the depths? It is first and foremost an education in the poetics of the vortex, whose creative lineaments the diver follows as winding himself into its hollow he unlocks the door of the unknown. Of course what is offered here, fragments of passages from Poe, Valery, Pessoa, Pound and others (whirled together perhaps for the first time) can only be the *membra disiecta* of such a program, but they indicate at least that such a literature exists, albeit neglected. Nor, of course, is the diver's upperworldly education conducted entirely at a school desk. It whirls out to embrace associatively widening gyres of experience, a growing involvement in the world. A later skill in collecting shells from the seabed, say, is preceded by an eye for such things above. The Roman building tradition, and its self-conscious intensification in the architecture of Alberti and Michelangelo, uses the shell as a metonymy of the building itself. The scallop is one half of the cupola; it is the porch and the preferred peripheral decoration of doorways; the scallop crowns windows and is imprinted under eaves. As the type of the shell, it encrusts the temples of the upperworld in a precious casement of marine history. To enter these places is to swim into a dark, richly coralled grotto — the baroque interior is similar to the impression a diver has on the Barrier Reef.

Shells are symbols of vorticality ('vortex' is etymologically identical with 'vertex'): their recovery demands the depth psychology of a diver. Although shells pile up and form heaps, they also suggest vortical staircases, openings, doublings and returns: there is a difference between the deposited midden and the spirit in which the diver collects shell fish, sponges and other wealth of the underwater. The diver is the figure associated with the cosmos of chalk: he plunges into the depths and in the process provides a model of De Quincey's mental

deep sea dive through which the strangest data are brought together and mysteriously connected. Jacques Cousteau's descriptions of the hallucinations that divers suffer is similar to what happens to the 'facts' in the whirling recovery that De Quincey compares to the structure of the involute.[95] The diver is the aesthete who, like the English art writer Adrian Stokes, attempts to derive the surface incrustations of the fifteenth-century Italian low relief sculptors from the deep geological history of the materials into which they cut.[96] (There is another association here, which Stokes didn't notice, between scallop, scalpel and sculpture—the sculptor is a kind of human mollusc who constructs around him an exoskeleton of ideal forms.) The diver goes down: if the twinned shells of the cockle shell resemble the labia majora, then he can go down sexually, but what counts is the larger aphrodisiac of salt and the plunge into deeper waters.

V

It is important to emphasise the reasonableness—the worldiness—of the principles informing the art of transition. Turbulence, and its face, the vortex, have usually been associated with madness, a classification that also has its counterpart in geographical pathology. When the spirit held dominion over his body, Swedenborg wrote, the body 'flew up, in a manner, and hid itself in an infinitude, as a centre. There was love itself. And it seems as if it extended around therefrom, and then down again; thus, by an incomprehensible circle, from the centre, which was love, around, and so thither again.'[97] Inaugurated into a higher life, Swedenborg 'was bandaged and wrapped in wonderful and indescribable courses of circles'.[98] But this was the man that Kant thought typified a disease of the soul, a certain 'irrational fanaticism (*Schwärmerei*) that was then thought [1790] to be infecting the European mentality.[99] People who interested themselves in mesmerism, clairvoyance, ESP and the like had 'crossed the line'—'just as if a man who crosses the equator for the first time were in danger of losing his understanding'.[100] But it is not necessary to prove that madness has its cultural logic or that reason floats on an unconscious sea: in poetic geography, Blake's vortices and the turbulence of the infinite that they

manifest belong to the physics of rondure. Australia, Hades, the hollow, all spiralling traces forming in the wake of passage are the unwrappings of the one infinite plane. The topology of the twist applies equally to the organisation of sociability and the elemental architecture of the world.

The archipelago that characterises the new geography reflects an oceanic consciousness, an ease with the ebb and flow of relations and a competence to traverse the deep. I do not know why Blake demonised Newton: if there was a problem with Newton's metaphysics (as opposed to his physics) it was due to its landlubberly delegation of oceans and islands to a secondary place in the spiritual universe — and this, to judge from the relative absence of 'Ocean' from Blake's otherwise encyclopaedic mythography, was a bias the poet shared. In this sense, just as Milton was of the devil's party without knowing it, so Blake was of Newton's party without admitting it. Blake wrote of his 'three years Slumber on the banks of the Ocean'; Newton used a similar figure to sum up his life's work: 'I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.'[101] Perhaps we should say that both were of the Ocean's party without knowing it. However, their spiritual geographies remain landlocked. Thus, developing the proposition that 'The whole world natural consisting of heaven & earth signifies ... whole world politique consisting of thrones & people', Newton explains, 'In earth the dry land & congregated waters, (as a sea a river a flood) are put for the peoples of several regions nations & dominions', describing 'Mountains & Islands' as being 'for the cities of the earth & sea politique with their territories & dominions'.[102] There is no suggestion here of a political economy derived from the fluidity of the sea.

Blake, of course, had a far more ramified mythological geology, which, if I understand it, remained resolutely pre-Huttonian. Where Hutton derived the present distribution and topography of the earth's land forms from forces of upthrust, erosion and renewal, Blake adhered to the older, Neptunian (or Biblical) theory of the land's formation in

which the dry surface of the world originally floated on top of a subterranean ocean. Hence, in Burnet's *Sacred Theory* before the Deluge the surface floated on the waters and was composed of particles aggregating on the oil surface to form a crust—but after a time it began 'to crack and open in fissures…'[103] This could be easily be allegorised:

> The crimes of mankind had for some time been preparing to draw down the wrath of heaven; and they at length induced the Deity to defer repairing those breaches of nature. Thus the chasms of the earth everyday became wider, and, at length, they penetrated to the great abyss of waters, and the whole earth in a manner fell in. Then ensued a total disorder in the uniform beauty of the first creation.[104]

On this thesis the Flood (Deluge) was due to a vast migration of waters of the great abyss (mainly identified with the Pacific) and the present appearance of the globe is due to our 'fall' into the abyss: 'the oceans and the seas are still a part of the ancient abyss that have not had a place to return to. Islands and rocks are fragments of the earth's former crust; kingdoms and continents are larger masses of its broken substance; and all the inequalities that are to be found on the surface of the present earth, are owing to the accidental confusion into which both earth and waters were the thrown…'[105]

This raises two questions: what was the 'uniform beauty' of the First Creation like? Blomfield quotes Buffon: 'Though the inequalities upon the surface of the earth may be considered a deformity in its figure, they are absolutely necessary to vegetation and animal life …[106] Similarly a Mr Kirwan is quoted approvingly for saying that mountains are providentially designed—convincing proofs of wisdom and beneficence'.[107] In this case the sea only matters as a leveller, an agent of moral renewal and regulation: the Deluge myth suggests that mountains (islands and continents) are produced negatively, not by Huttonian upthrust but by the collapse of the uniform surface into the abyss, producing a displacement of subterranean waters and a disastrous rise in the sea's level. The uplift of the water produces the conditions of the second creation where

peoples and places are fragmented, split apart and subject to local variation. It is the situation lamented at the beginning of the Medea[108] but it is also quite consistent with the imperial rationalisation of colonisation, for where all are primordially displaced the rational redistribution of human kind to redeem the 'waste' is an act of redemption, kindness, replacement and progress. In this scenario the levels of the sea signify a Paradisal uniformity but also the apocalyptic punishment of human evil.

In a similar vein, Blake thought that the British Isles were fragments of the ancient Albion qua Atlantis, inundated during the Flood:

> The fall of Albion included a deluge in which the centre of Atlantis was overwhelmed and only the fragments of the British isles were left. The settlement of America by the English and revolt of America against the dead hand of English tyranny is therefore the dawn of a new age in which Atlantis begins to appear above the waves. In the meantime England still exists in the spiritual world as Atlantis, and Blake's engraved poems are on its mountains.[109]

According to this vision, postlapsarians inhabit an archipelago bordered on every part by the abyss. Thus displaced the balance of the displaced water had collected into water bodies of which the greatest modern survival is the Pacific Ocean. Newton dived to the bottom of the sea to find the solid ground of reason when, with the advantage of Blake's mythopoetic fantasy, he should have been looking on the mountain tops for the original state of things. But it is obvious that the abyssal archipelago sketched here is different from the archipelago of the new cosmos described earlier, not only in its origin but in its internal and external isolation. The new Atlantis is an archipelago from the start, a distribution of forces, a field of actual relations and potential exchanges and transformations.

What, exactly, is Newton drawing with his dividers? It is a question that cannot be answered correctly without also asking: what does Blake *draw* Newton drawing? Thus, in Blake's perspective, Newton's perfect circle looks like a flattened

circle or oval. Newton may think it is a purely logical form, an immaterial concept corresponding exactly to a mathematical equation, but, inscribed within the turbulent 'vortex' of infinity, its egocentricity is a sign that it belongs to 'those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world' but which 'for want of the poetical faculty' have 'proportionally circumscribed those of the internal world'. So Blake's poetical faculty enables him to circumscribe Newton, and by depicting him at the bottom of the sea to suggest that, while his 'science' enslaves the elements, he himself remains the slave of his own calculations.

In this convoluted reflective perspective, Newton's circle becomes a version of the 'mundane shell': 'The world of time and space in the egg-shaped Mundane Shell is a symbolic representation of the perfect circle of the eternal Sun.'[110] The mistake is to suppose the fallen image can represent the divine truth, the finite the infinite — to suppose that the egg is a circle, the ovoid a perfect round. Still, perhaps Newton knew this: drawing his figure on a scroll, itself still partly rolled up, he might anticipate new geometries yet hidden, the higher calculus of turbulence. After all, I suppose that drawing a circle under water would produce a warped figure.

To go back to Blake and Newton on their respective beaches: Playing and sleeping, experimentally rearranging or handing over rearrangement to the unconscious, as occurred in the composition of 'Milton'. Either way ideas come to them on the shore, on the edge of the known — where the Ocean stands for the unknown. The strand is where one is stranded, imprisoned, but in touch with mysterious strands, it is the threshold of the labyrinth, it is where, in Keats's mythopoeia, conventional language gives out and the question is posed: 'Are there not other regions than this isle?'[111] Keats conducts a subtle meditation on the contrasting homes represented by land and sea: when he speaks of the 'deep blue' as representing the Ocean's 'Nativeness', he defines the unknown region in terms of its reflection, the blue sky: 'What strange powers/ Has thou, as a mere shadow!'[112] Keats explicitly identifies the environmental beyond with the afterlife when 'on the shore/ Of the wide world I stand alone, and think/ Till love and fame to nothingness do sink.'[113] Thought or intellection cuts both

ways: it confirms our insignificance — Newton's sense of being but a little boy — but it also produces a sense of detachment that is intolerable, something like the dizzying vertigo of nothingness experienced by Pessoa, and, in reaction, a desire of connection that is irresistible, dynamically pretty much as the waves repeatedly withdraw only to renew their battery on the land.

So the first vortex, psychologically speaking, is the second birth through which the biological human is initiated into the spiritual human, an event that occurs in adolescence and may be associated with sexual self-awareness but is more profoundly the birth of the double consciousness, the translation of the path into the spiral. Vico falls from a ladder in his father's library and is knocked out, but he attributes his future calling to the acuity of wit his concussion induced.[114] Swedenborg experienced dizziness or *deliquium* — 'In a dream a roaring wind picked him up and threw him on his face ...'[115] preliminary to twenty-five years of daily intercourse with angels. Deliquium? To absorb moisture from the air. That is, the usually dry man became humid, like one walking into the water. More famously, as we saw, the author of vortices, but more influentially of geometrical reasoning, Descartes, arrived at his famous formulation through a storm of perturbation — and one remembers that another term for agoraphobia is *Platzschwindel*, dizziness in open spaces. Further, in another dream associated with his intellectual breakthrough, Descartes imagined himself submerged in a turbulent stream, and panic-stricken, made as best he could for the bank, and shaking off the water, set out in a straight line, on the grounds that it must eventually lead somewhere.

The humid man is not, like Descartes, out of his depth: he learns to swim, to dive: the height of his ascent will be proportioned to the depth of his descent. He will be an examiner of reefs and learn to hold his breath: the writer who ducks under horizons, as opposed to descending in a chariot from the sky beyond, learns to hold her breath. This is dramatic: after all, the whole of theatre occurs in the instant between two breaths, it is like a suspended swoon, such as one might experience waiting for a loved one at the station. In any case the traveller who comes out of the vortex of immersion

is neither a slumberer nor a little boy playing; the fate of Virgil's steersman, particularly as it is interpreted by the poet of diving, Giuseppe Ungaretti, is to remain too fixed on his destination.[116] In a sense he falls asleep at the wheel because, perhaps like Blake's Newton, he fails to take account of Poseidon's moodiness. He is not up for the artistry of complex change. Because of his obdurateness he is turned into a rocky promontory, whereas the Orphic investigator of Ungaretti's genius glimpses remote ages through the pellucid water and manages the task of carrying them forward into the constitution of the present. The humid traveller enjoys liquidity because he navigates vortices whose communication is based on momentary disequilibriums, inherent instabilities that propel him from one eddy to the next. It is notable that Blake regarded the stars as fragments of the primal sun, astronomical equivalents of Orpheus' severed and divided tongue but Newton explained their motions without regretting it. Newton did something else which recommends him to travellers in the Pacific, who adapt to the dark: he attributed their scintillations to the atmosphere: 'For the Air through which we look upon the Stars, is in a perpetual Tremor; as may be seen by the tremulous Motion of Shadows cast from high Towers.'[117]

Atmospheric turbulence transforms lunar and solar rays into a tremulous motion of shadows. By day this tremor is the sparkling of the waves—Keats describes 'Blue' as 'the life of waters'; 'Ocean/ And all its vassal streams, pools numberless,/ May rage, and foam, and fret, but never can/ Subside, if not to dark blue nativeness.'[118] Is it possible to dwell in this Atlantic where all nostalgia for the ground has to be given up? It is a mistake to associate the ocean with oblivion, to imagine it solely in terms of the abysses it conceals and its inventories of shipwrecks. It lifts up as well as brings down; and its vital turbulence, ceaselessly active even when it sleeps, brings us into the arms of the future we can never inhabit more surely than in human prophecy. As perhaps the greatest poet of the maelstrom, Herman Melville, reflected:

There is, one knows not what sweet mystery about this sea, whose gently awful stirrings seems to speak of some hidden soul beneath; like those fabled undulations of the

Ephesian sod over the buried Evangelist St John. And meet it is, that over these sea-pastures, wide-rolling watery prairies and Potters' Fields of all four continents, the waves should rise and fall, and ebb and flow unceasingly; for here, millions of mixed shades and shadows, drowned dreams, somnambulisms, reveries; all that we call lives and souls, lie dreaming, dreaming, still; tossing like slumberers in their beds; the ever-rolling waves but made so by their restlessness.[119]

Notes

1. W. Blake, 'Milton', Book The First, 15: 21-5 in *Complete Writings*, ed. G. Keynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 497. For discussion of this and related passages, see Mark Greenberg, 'Blake's Vortex', *Colby Quarterly* 14, no. 4 (1978): 198-212.

2. William Blake, 'Milton', Book The First, 15: 32-3.

3. From Felpham, a seaside town near Bognor Regis, where he lived between 1800 and 1803, Blake write to his friend Thomas Butts: 'none can know the Spiritual Acts of my three years Slumber on the banks of the Ocean unless he has seen them in the Spirit or unless he should read My Long Poem descriptive of those Acts'. (Blake, *Complete Writings*, 823.) On the question of whether 'Vala or the Four Zoas' or 'Milton' is referred to here, see S. Goldsmith, *Blake's Agitation: Criticism and the Emotions* (Baltimore, MA: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 114.

4. M. C. Percival, *William Blake's Circle of Destiny* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938), 148.

5. And also erotic in the largest sense: Swedenborg, Blake's sometime master, writes of 'the divine love, radiating from the lord as the Sun ...', E. Swedenborg, *The True Christian Religion* (London: Dent, 1933, 420). With dogmatic straightforwardness, Swedenborg declares that 'the heat and light proceeding from the Lord as a Sun contain all the infinities of the Lord', (420) a fact that the creative imagination recognises when, as celebrated in Blake's famous 'Auguries of Innocence', it discerns 'infinities' within 'simple phenomena' (420-1).

6. 'the threefold division [between mind, psyche, and spirit] has collapsed into two, because soul has become identified with spirit. This happens because we are materialists, so that everything that is not physical and body is one undifferentiated cloud; or it happens because we are Christians', J. Hillman, *Re-Visioning Psychology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 68.

7. P. B. Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry' in *The Selected Poetry and Prose of Shelley* (Ware, Herts: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), 635-60, 655.

8. Although cognate with words signifying 'East', Auster becomes identified in Roman usage with the south wind. Strictly speaking, 'Australia' refers to a realm further to the south and east of where Australia lies.

9. Sandra Saunders, *They've got God on Their Side*, in 'Deadly in between Heaven and Hell' exhibition, Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute, Adelaide, March 2012.

10   'Everything under Creation is represented in the soil and in the stars. Everything
      has two witnesses, one on earth and one in the sky.' Properly conducted life
      conforms to the lessons drawn from the stories discerned in the order of the
      stars: 'Everything is represented in the ground and in the sky'. (D. Mowaljarli and
      J. Malnic, *Yorro Yorro: Everything Standing Up Alive* (Broome, WA: Magabala
      Books, 200, 5.

11   A. S. Gourlay, *An Emergency Online Glossary of Terms, Names, and Concepts in
      Blake*, at <http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/glossary.xq?chunk.
      id=glossary&toc.depth=1&toc.id=0>.

12   R. V. Billigheimer, 'The eighth eye: prophetic vision in Blake's poetry and design',
      Colby Quarterly 22, no. 2 (June 198): 93–110, 94.

13   K. Raine, *Blake and Tradition* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), 85.

14   See note 1 above.

15   D. Chow, 'Moon's reflected "earthshine" may aid Search for alien life', 29
      February2012, at <http://www.space.com/14712-earthshine-moon-light-alien-life.
      html>.

16   Ludmilla Kolokolova et al., 'Astrobiological remote sensing with circular
      polarization', in *Polarimetric Detection: Characterisation and Remote Sensing*, eds
      M.I. Mishchenko et al. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), 278.

17   T.M. Gledhill et al., 'Astro-biological signatures: prospects for the detection
      of non-terrestrial biological material', at <http://uhra.herts.ac.uk/bitstream/
      handle/2299/1690/901878.pdf?sequence=113>.

18   Patrick Frank et al., 'On one hand but not the other: the challenge of the origin
      and survival of homochirality in prebiotic chemistry', in *Chemistry for the 21st
      Century*, eds E. Keinan and I. Schecter (Weinheim: Wiley, 2001),175–208, 176.

19   S. Bagnulo et al., 'The earth as benchmark: spectro-polarietry unveils strong
      bio-signatures', see the Smithsonian/NASA Astrophysics Data System at <http://
      adsabs.harvard.edu/abs/2012EGUGA..1412224B>.

20   A. von Humboldt, *Cosmos, A Sketch of the Physical Description of the Universe*, vol.
      1, trans. E.C. Otté (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1997), 33.

21   Blake, 'Milton', Book The First, 15: 29.

22   Swedenborg, *The True Christian Religion*, 91.

23   Ibid., 90.

24   S. Rosen, *Metaphysics in Ordinary Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press,
      1999), 23.

25   Known as the first Olympian Dream. In the period leading up to his first
      Olympian dream, Descartes 'found himself caught in a continual contention
      in which he could find diversion neither in walking nor in human society', J. R.
      Cole, *The Olympian Dreams and Youthful Rebellion of René Descartes* (Urbana:
      University of Illinois Press, 1992), 32.

26   Striking visualisations of his whirlpools of matter can be found on the web.
      A particularly beautiful and widely reproduced diagram is from Descartes'
      Principia Philosophiae, Amsterdam, 1653, 134.

27   Writing in 1676. See Christia Mercer, *Leibniz's Metaphysics: Its Origins and
      Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 415 for this passage
      and discussion.

28   A. C. Swinburne, 'The Triumph of Time', at <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/
      poem/174574>

29   William Blake, 'Jerusalem', Plate 18, 2–3. *Complete Writings*, 640.

30   *Phaedo*, 107a-115a.

31   Cornford, *Principium Sapientiae* (New York: Harper & Row, 1952 [1912]), 194 n.1.

32   M. T. Varro, *Varro on the Latin Language* 2 vols, trans. R.G. Hunt (London:
      Heinemann, 1947), vol. 1, 17.

33   Varro, vol. 1, 19.
34   Varro, vol.1, 19.
35   J. Carcopino, *La Basilique Pythagorienne de la Porte Majeure* (Paris, 1926), 288.
36   H. Baker, *Persephone's Cave* (Athens, 1979), 121.
37   A. Carnoy *Dictionnaire Etymologique du Proto Indo-Europeen* (Louvain: Institute Orientaliste, 1955), 174.
38   Hillman, 109.
39   W. Blake, 'Milton', Book The First, 15: 3-31.
40   S. F. Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (New York: Dutton, 1971), 369.
41   Ibid., 69.
42   Ibid., 247.
43   Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains, A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans,* trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 137.
44   Rosen, 16.
45   Ibid., 30.
46   Ibid., 31.
47   Ibid.
48   Ibid.
49   Ibid., 32
50   Hannah Arendt, 'What remains? The language remains' in *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. P. Baehr (London: Penguin, 2000), 21
51   Predrag Matvejevic, *Mediterranean: A Cultural Landscape*, trans. M.H. Heim (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999),163.
52   Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, *Hamlet's Mill*, Boston: Nonpareil, 2005, 146.
53   Thomas Belt, *The Naturalist in Nicaragua* (London: J.M. Dent, 1928), 233.
54   Ibid.
55   P. Carter, *The Lie of the Land* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996).
56   T.G.H. Strehlow, *Songs of Central Australia* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1971), 444.
57   M. Serres, 'The Origin of Language: Biology, Information Theory, & Thermodynamics', in Hermes; Literature, Science, Philosophy, ed. J. V. Harari and David F. Bell (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982). At <http://mysite.pratt.edu/~arch543p/readings/origin_of_language.html>.
58   Matvejevic, 17.
59   K. Siivonen, 'An archipelago of identities', presentation at BSRS, Mare Balicum, University of Turku, 17 October 2008, 1-43, 3.
60   Laurence Durrell, *Reflections on a Marine Venus* (London: Faber & Faber, 1953), 15
61   Siivonen, 14.
62   M. Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo* (London: J.M. Dent, 1936), 329. The number varies in different manuscripts. See <https://www.mail-archive.com/maphist@geo.uu.nl/msg01475.html>.
63   von Humboldt .
64   See A. P. Burnett, *The Art of Bacchylides* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1985), chapter 2.
65   W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 136.
66   *Blast: Review of the Great English Vortex*, no. 1 (1914)
67   F. Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet,* trans. Alfred Mac Adam (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), 19.
68   See entry for Walter Benjamin, S*tanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/benjamin/>.

69   C. Tomlins, 'Revolutionary justice in Brecht, Conrad and Blake', *Law and Literature* 21, no. 2, 185-213 (2009), 188.

70   T. Conley, 'Foreword', G. Deleuze, *The Fold*, trans. T. Conley (London: Continuum, 2003), xii.

71   At <politicaltheory.wustl.edu/workshop_papers/Tomlins,Revolutionary%20 Justice.pdf>

72   Paul Valery, 'Introduction to the method of Leonardo da Vinci' and 'Poetry and abstract thought', in *An Anthology*, selected by J. R. Lawler from *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry*, ed. J. Mathews (London: Routledge, 1977), 34.

73   Valery, 'Introduction to the method of Leonardo da Vinci', 34.

74   Thomas De Quincey, 'Suspiria in Profundis', *Essays* (London: Ward, Lock and Co, 1886), 137ff.

75   Ibid., 103.

76   Ibid.

77   Ibid., 104.

78   E. A. Poe, *The Conchologist's First Book* (New York: Haswell, Barrington and Haswell, 1839), 16.

79   Ibid.

80   Ibid., 17.

81   Ibid.

82   Ibid., 144.

83   Ibid., 146.

84   Ibid., 147.

85   Ibid., 18.

86   Ibid., 159.

87   Valery.

88   See <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sinistral_and_dextral>.

89   G. Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*, trans. E. R. Farrell and C.F. Farrell (Dallas: Dallas Institute, 1988), 241.

90   Ibid., 242.

91   Ibid., 241.

92   Ibid., 242.

93   M. Le Cron Foster, 'The symbolic structure of primordial language', in *Human Evolution: Biosocial Perspectives*, ed. S.L. Washburn and E.R. McCown (Menlo Park, Calif: Benjamin/Cummings 1978), 117.

94   With reference to a somewhat vortical radio work, P. Carter, 'Underworlds of Jean du Chas', a radio work inspired by Samuel Beckett's imaginary art movement 'Concentrisme'.) 'HOLLOW: He spoke to me. He said: Spit the diddy, anchorites, cast anchor from the breast, dear friends. We have rites below to perform, I have prepared the abyss. Cup the crucible, mateys, advancing towards the edge. Don the goggles and the bit (qualified hypnogogues will help). Then like a harpoon plunge, my crystals, towards the centre of the fire. O blessed is the man who makes the perfect rip and leaves no ripple in his wake; his soul is shared with the universe'.

95   J. Y. Cousteau, *The Silent World* (London, Hamish Hamilton, 1953).

96   A. Stokes, 'The pleasures of limestone: a geological medley', chapter 2 of *Stones of Rimini* (1934) in *The Critical Writings of Adrian Stokes* 3 vols, ed. L. Gowing (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), vol. 1, 190-204.

97   E. Swedenborg, *Swedenborg's Journal of Dreams*, trans. J.J.G. Wilkinson (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1977), 28.

98   Swedenborg, *Swedenborg's Journal of Dreams*, 13.

99   Robert E. Butts, *Kant and the Double Government Methodology* (Dordrecht: Reidel Publishing Company, 1984), 11-12.

100 I. Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. H.H. Rudnick (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978)

101 P. N. Moore, *The End of History, Messiah Conspiracy* (np: Ramshead Press, 1996), 518.

102 See <www.newtonproject.sussex.ac.uk/view/texts/normalized/THEM00005>.

103 E. Blomfield, *A General View of the World, Geographical, Historical and Philosophical*, in 2 vols, (Bungay: C. Brightey & T. Kinnersley), vol 1, 129.

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid.,129-30.

106 Ibid., 99.

107 Kirwan in Ibid.

108 See opening speech of Euripides' *Medea*: 'I wish they'd never chopped the pine trees down/ in those mountain forests up on Pelion,/ to make oars for the hands of those great men/ who set off, on Pelias' orders,/ to fetch the golden fleece: <https://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/euripides/medea.htm> lines 5-9.

109 N. Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 129.

110 R. Billigheimer, 'Conflict and conquest: creation, emanation and the female in William Blake's mythology', *Modern Language Studies* 30, no. 1.

111 J. Keats, 'Hyperion', *Poetical Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

112 J. Keats, 'Written in Answer to a Sonnet Ending Thus', Sonnets IX, *Poetical Works*, 367.

113 J. Keats, 'Sonnets', VII, Poetical Works, 13-14, *Poetical Works*, 366.

114 See D. P. Verene, 'Giambattista Vico', in *A Companion to Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. S. Nadler (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 564.

115 B. Worcester, *Swedenborg: Harbinger of the New Age of the Christian Church* (Philadelpha: J.B. Lippincott, 1912), 167.

116 G. Ungaretti, 'Palinurus', *La Terra Promessa*, 1950.

117 I. Newton, *Opticks, or a Treatise of the Reflections, Refractions, Inflections and Colours of Light*, [1730] New York: Dover Publications, 1952), 110.

118 See note 114 above.

119 H. Melville, *Moby Dick*. Melville's vorticism is explicitly designed to disprove the pantheistic optimism of the Transcendentalists.

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Postcommodity (USA) is an indigenous arts collective comprised of Raven Chacon, Cristóbal Martinez, Kade L. Twist, and Nathan Young. Their work functions as a shared indigenous lens and voice to engage and respond to the contemporary realities of globalism and neoliberalism. They have had many exhibitions and performance events, including solo exhibitions at the Museum of Contemporary Native Arts, New Mexico (2010), and Center for the Future, Czech Republic (2007), Headlands Center for the Arts (2013) and Tucson Museum of Contemporary Art (2014). Their work was included in the 18th Biennale of Sydney and the Adelaide International (2012).

Gerald Raunig (Austria) is a philosopher and art theoretician, based at the Zurich Hochschule der Kunste and at the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies, Vienna. He has written on the nexus of art and activism in *Art and Revolution. Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century* (2007). He is also co-editor of *Art and Critical Practice: Reinventing Institutional Critique* (2009) and author of *A Thousand Machines: A Concise Philosophy of the Machine as Social Movement* (2010) and *Factories of Knowledge, Industries of Creativity* (2013).

Danae Stratou (Greece/USA) represented Greece in the 48th Venice Biennale, Italy (1999). She also participated in the main programs of the 1st Valencia Biennale, Spain (2001); Bienal International del Deporte en el Arte —BIDA 2005 Seville, Spain (2005); 5th International Biennial of Contemporary Art, Gyumri, Armênia (2006); 1st Thessaloniki Biennale, Greece (2007); Istanbul—Culture Capital of Europe 2010, International Visual Arts Program, Turkey (2010); the Adelaide Festival, exhibition 'Restless—Adelaide International 2012', Australia (2012). In 2010 she initiated and co-founded the non-profit organisation Vital Space, a global, interdisciplinary, cross-media art platform addressing the pressing issues of our time.

Jan Verwoert (Netherlands) is a critic and writer on contemporary art and cultural theory, based in Berlin. He is a contributing editor of *Frieze* magazine and his writing has appeared in different journals, anthologies and monographs. He teaches at the Piet Zwart Institute Rotterdam, the de Appel curatorial program and the Ha'Midrasha School of Art, Tel Aviv. He is author of *Bas Jan Ader: In Search of the Miraculous* (MIT Press/Afterall Books, 2006) and the essay collection *Tell Me What You Want What You Really Really Want* (Sternberg Press/Piet Zwart Institute, 2010).

Linda Marie Walker (Australia) is a writer, artist and curator, with interests in conceptual and minimalist art practices, experimental writing practices, ficto-critical research methodologies, electronic thinking, spatial-relations, bodies, and movement. Her research area is 'an archaeology of surfaces'. She is an adjunct senior lecturer at the School of Art, Architecture and Design, University of South Australia and has

published widely in Australia in art, literary and academic journals. She was director of the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia (www.cacsa.org.au/cacsa) and editor of its magazine *Broadsheet* (1998-99).

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Art in the Global Present presents a fascinating collection of essays that together reveal how art is currently navigating a globalised world. It addresses social issues such as the impact of migration, the 'war on terror' and the global financial crisis, and questions the transformations produced by new forms of flexible labour and the digital revolution. Through examining the resistance to the politics of globalisation in contemporary art, presenting the construction of an alternative geography of the imagination and reflecting on art's capacity to express the widest possible sense of being, this book explores the worlds that artists make when they make art.

A multifaceted perspective on the complexity of these issues is reached through the words of a diverse range of art practitioners and comment- ators, including acclaimed artists Lucy Orta, Callum Morton, Danae Stratou and the collective Postcommodity, international curators Hou Hanru, Cuauhtémoc Medina, Ranjit Hoskote and Linda Marie Walker and art critics, academics, writers and theorists Jean Burgess, Paul Carter, Barbara Creed, Geert Lovink, Scott McQuire, Nikos Papastergiadis, Gerald Raunig and Jan Verwoert.

Cover illustration:
Socratis Socratous, *Architectural Strategy*, 2011, c-print photograph, 124.5 × 186.5 cm
Courtesy the artist and Omikron Gallery, Nicosia