

**Reading Room:
A Journal of Art
and Culture**

ART GOES ON
ISSUE/03 **2009**

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*Edited by Christina Barton,
Natasha Conland and Wystan Curnow*

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Natasha Conland
Wystan Curnow

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Photographers:

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Contact

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Or write to the
Managing Editor at:

E.H McCormick
Research Library
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki
PO Box 5449
Auckland
New Zealand

Email:

library@aucklandartgallery.govt.nz

Phone:

+64 9 307 7714

Fax.:

+64 9 302 1096

Web:

www.aucklandartgallery.govt.nz

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Luis Jacob

A Dance for Those of Us Whose Hearts Have Turned to Ice, Based on the Choreography of Françoise Sullivan and the Sculpture of Barbara Hepworth (With Sign-Language Supplement) 2007
Video (DVD), colour, silent, 08'35 mins.
Three-channel video installation with free-standing wall, HD video projection, television monitors, and area rug; reading area with 16-page brochure, teak-root chairs, mirror-polish chrome table, and handwoven basket
Overall installation dimensions:

426 x 365 x 240 cm

Courtesy of Birch Libralato, Toronto

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Marylyn Mayo and Mavis Mason

Marylyn Mayo as
a child with her
mother Mavis Mason

The Marylyn Mayo Foundation was established by Dr John Mayo to benefit a number of causes, including the advancement and wider appreciation of the visual arts. The Foundation's support has enabled the Auckland Art Gallery to establish two major initiatives: the Marylyn Mayo Internships and *Reading Room*. The journal differs from other Foundation projects in that its establishment is in memory of both Marylyn Mayo and her mother, Mavis Mason, in recognition of their shared interest in the visual arts.

Born and raised in New Zealand, Marylyn Eve Mayo had a lifelong interest in education, law and the visual arts. Her academic career established her as a legal pioneer in Australasia. Marylyn was one of fewer than two dozen women law graduates when she completed her degree at the University of Auckland in 1960. Her legacy is honoured at its Law School with the Marylyn Eve Mayo Endowment Scholarship and the Marylyn Mayo Rare Book Room. Marylyn's parents, Mavis and Sydney Mason, moved with her to Auckland when she began her university studies. Mavis Mason had always been an artist and the move to Auckland enabled her to develop this talent: in the 1960s she studied painting with one of New Zealand's most celebrated artists, Colin McCahon. Mavis's interest in art was imparted to Marylyn who enjoyed visiting art galleries and, from the time she was a recent graduate, began collecting works by contemporary New Zealand artists including Colin McCahon, Don Binney and Richard Killeen.

In 1969, Marylyn moved to Australia to teach law at the University of Queensland's campus in Townsville, soon to be known as James Cook University. It was here that she met and married John Mayo in 1970. In 1974, Mavis joined Marylyn and John in Townsville, remaining in Australia for the rest of her life. Marylyn's vision to establish a separate Faculty of Law at James Cook University was realized in 1989 when she became the Foundation Head of its newly established Law School. She retired in 1996 but her links with the University remained with the establishment of the Marylyn Mayo Medal and the Law Students' Society's annual Mayo Lecture.

Catherine Hammond
Managing editor

Introduction

Christina Barton, for the editors

This issue of *Reading Room* was conceived from a desire to understand our current moment. Responding to our sense of a relentlessly expanding art world buoyed by bullish markets that appeared to be overwhelming critical attempts to account for its proliferating forms, we wanted to know how we might contend with the effervescence of the now and attend to the task of historical reckoning, knowing full well that coherent critical frameworks no longer served.

But what set out as a melancholic quest for meaning, in an era that seemed to no longer require it, has somehow shifted from conception to realisation. In the short timeframe of less than a year the conditions for art practice have dramatically changed as we witness global economic meltdown. And in the space created by these shifts a new sense of urgency to grant art agency has been reawakened. Our call for papers has been answered with responses that resist art's headlong momentum at the same time as willing it to go on.

What emerges in the essays is a tenacious and surprising optimism for the potential of art to still serve: in the articulation of the ethical conditions of civil society (Terry Smith); as "place holder" for the unrealised promise implicit in radical artistic gestures of the past (Helena Reckitt); or as a tool to rewire the logic of the commodity (Jon Bywater, Anthony White). Further, there are signs of the survival of trust in the critical enterprise, not in terms of the production of synoptic narratives (as the Round Table that follows clearly shows), but as a means to grapple with the present (Lee Weng Choy) or to anatomise the character of a medium (Adrian Martin), or to demonstrate how viewing itself – as a form of consumption – may have a certain agency (Natasha Conland). In face of the rhetoric of globalisation, here are calls to acknowledge the situatedness of discourse; and in contradistinction to the amnesia-inducing effects of consumer culture, here resides some sense of the efficacy and availability of the past and its ongoing purchase on the present.

If we agree with Peter Brunt's contention that the "counterpart to 'art goes on' is 'art becomes history'", then the dialectical tension that operates between these two trajectories might serve as a salutary reminder that there is no escape from temporality, nor from the historical conditions within which art is made and framed. But it might also be thought of as a means to keep both the practice of art and its effects in play.

Fig. 1
Michael Parekowhai
Song of the Frog 2005
Automotive paint,
fibreglass
1800 x 1100 x 825 mm
Courtesy of the artist and
Michael Lett, Auckland



Round Table

The State of Art and Discourse in New Zealand

coordinated and edited by Christina Barton

The purpose of this round table was to focus on the situation for art and discourse in New Zealand at this historical juncture. Given that the globalisation of the art world is one of the contemporary's strongest rhetorical claims, the editors of Reading Room (Christina Barton, Natasha Conland and Wystan Curnow) believed it was timely and worthwhile to situate the discussion within a local frame. To that end, we invited a varied group of participants (all of whom have been shaped by working here) – Emma Bugden, newly appointed Director of ARTSPACE (Auckland); Peter Brunt, art historian; Gregory Burke, Director of The Power Plant in Toronto; Gavin Hipkins, artist; Robert Leonard, Director of the Institute of Modern Art in Brisbane, and Damian Skinner, freelance curator and writer – to join us to consider our situation. Our conversation took place over an intensive three-week period in January and February 2009. What follows is an edited transcript of our discussion.

Christina Barton. *To begin, then, let me ask: how do we characterise this moment? What are the issues facing us? What are the telling indicators and signposts that mark the territory?*

Peter Brunt. I take my cue from an exhibition I saw recently at the Auckland Art Gallery. It was a modest show curated by Ngahiraka Mason (*Turukil Turukil Paneke Paneke! When Maori Art became Contemporary*) that recreated an even more modest show staged 50 years ago in the Education Department at the University of Auckland: the first exhibition by Maori artists using the language of western modernism held in 1958 and showing works by Ralph Hotere, Katerina Mataira, Muru Walters, Selwyn Wilson and Arnold Wilson. Mason's show was symptomatic, I think, of a recurrent way of dealing with the dilemmas of our current situation, which is to address where we are by re-presenting where we were. There is a concern with history and memory arising out of our situation now, which is not the old way of inhabiting history, where you could feel you were

making it. Mason's approach was fairly earnest, trying to construct a genealogy for contemporary Maori art over the past 50 years. But the attempt seemed to be retracting that story to something cultural and therefore heightening its particularity and relativity in the wider field of contemporary art.

At the exhibition I also happened to catch a public talk by Michael Parekowhai, Lisa Reihana and Brett Graham, billed as a response to the show by "the contemporary generation". Afterwards Michael, maybe picking up on the genealogical concept of the show, posed the question: So who's after us? Given they were no longer the "young guns" and were now "established" and "successful", who were the current crop of young Maori artists and what were they doing? What was the state of play for contemporary Maori artists now? (These are not his exact words but that was the drift). Names were named but as for the state of play, no-one was really too sure. This is one example of the kind of situation we are talking about.

The moment was riveting for me given the centrality of contemporary Maori art to the cultural discourse of this country throughout the 1990s – a discourse in which they and their cohorts were crucial players. That discourse was very much born from the local situation as it took shape in the late 1980s: the rise of neo-liberalism, the legislating of biculturalism, the establishment of treaty settlement procedures, the movement of Maori art "from the margins to the centre", and so on. Their work was an intimate part of that history. But it was also clear that it had played itself out, that it no longer held "centre stage", whatever its "afterlife" may be here and there. But the real problem is that the notion of "the centre" itself seems to have disappeared – at least as defined by the nation. The "centre" is now "the globe", which has no centre, and which produces this effect that even though things still matter to different people (the continuation of contemporary Maori art for example), their mattering feels atomised in relation to everything else. "Art goes on" – as we're saying – but it's hard to imagine anything now galvanizing the New Zealand art scene in quite the same way as contemporary Maori art managed to do in the 1990s. Indeed the very relationship between Maori and Pakeha, which has defined the epic history of this country to that point, seems to have run out of steam. It is locked into the establishment of course, and there's all this unfinished business, but as the legacy of that earlier history.

Looking back, contemporary art in the 1980s and 1990s seems fundamentally tied to an earlier national narrative as part of its "post-national" epilogue, part of the numerous critiques of nationalism that depended on the latter still being in place, even if just as a memory. That situation enabled artists here to make the aesthetic and philosophical implications of "postmodernism" locally relevant and critically important, not just an international fashion to follow. But we do seem to be facing a break from the comfort of that sort of critical cohesion in contemporary art here, simply from the multiplicity of ideas,

networks and practices in play. Criticism – which tries to say this matters, this is important – feels itself atomised, marginal, weakened, at the same time as the situation seems to cry out for it.

Wystan Curnow. Peter's opposition of cohesive as opposed to atomised discursive fields is usefully if starkly posed. The notion of centre as defined by the nation has disappeared, the world is the centre but it does not have one. Isn't this itself a convenient centrist myth? Is there no political geography to the art world? Isn't art still a European idea, one which over the last decade has opened its eyes, doors and wallets to cultures, unlike New Zealand's, it has yet to conquer? Are we not *situated*, Auckland, Brisbane and Toronto-based artists and critics that we are? I used to argue there is an "art world" and New Zealand is outside of it, off the map. Over the last decade that has changed; New Zealand now exists within (just), rather than beyond its margins, and that has been to the benefit of the development of individual artists and other art professionals. What, however, do we know about the discursive benefits or otherwise of this change?

Damian Skinner. From a perspective inside art history but outside the structures of contemporary art I'd say there is still plenty of cohesiveness in play – but only if you are viewing what is going on from the edges. If the centre cannot hold – and I can agree with what you have written as true – then it still holds in terms of what is not allowed to take part. To mention the two things I know most about: craft practices and a number of contemporary Maori practices aren't invited to the party which is "contemporary art". If the ideology of a post-nationalist art has lost its urgency, there are still a number of other ideologies sustaining art history in Aotearoa that don't even get any kind of examination, and show no signs of being under stress. But then I don't want to seem hostile to contemporary art, as though everything should be democratically levelled without recognition of specific histories, rules of the game, if you like. My point is that contemporary art is its own thing, different to craft, or to Maori art and maybe the sense of crisis registers differently (or not at all) when you look at local art history from a wider perspective.

Following up on Peter's comments about *Turuki Turukil*, I think that the really interesting aspect of this show is not that, by looking back, it reveals a crisis of forward momentum, a crisis which is tied up with contemporary Maori art losing its centrality to discourse, but that it reveals a kind of Maori art history that is actually opposed to the kind of Maori art practices which garnered all the attention in the 1990s. Or to be more precise it is opposed to what critics did with them, the use to which they were put. What Mason's modest show actually did was reframe history in a mode that rejects modernism – and therefore the postmodernist operations of artists like Parekowhai, or the theoretical accounts of people like George Hubbard (and other Pakeha writers) who articulated the urgency of this work as a fully homegrown manifestation of global issues – by knitting artists and objects together according to the metaphor of whakapapa.

Mason's show, despite its humility, was actually quite audacious in its ambitions. I think it demonstrates the reality of what I would call Maori art history – art history that is conceptually different to Pakeha art history, a kind of writing that conceives of history and art differently. It seems to me that this approach to art will cause some difficulty for Pakeha art historians, in terms of what kinds of art practices it might bring into the orbit of contemporary art (the kind of work that doesn't play the contemporary art game very well, work that is essentialist, for example). I don't want to be simplistic here and pretend this is some kind of binary – that's just a product of not having very many words to describe what I see happening. It is much more complex than that. Where Maori and Pakeha artists or writers sit is not straightforward. Maori art history, for example, is as much a product of postcolonial theory as Pakeha art history. This is what makes this moment seem particularly exciting.

Gregory Burke. My memory of the 1990s in New Zealand was of a generation pushing out into the world and in that sense I do not think the 1990s in New Zealand art can be solely characterised by nationalist or post-nationalist agendas. One artist of this generation, who remains firmly rooted in New Zealand, is Michael Parekowhai. He is an artist whose work in my view has significant relevance to international discourses and he is as interesting say as Brian Jungen, the aboriginal Canadian artist who is garnering a lot of attention from curators around the world. Parekowhai's work can be curated into Maori shows or post-nationalist shows, but his work is not adequately defined solely by these contexts. So the question for me is: is there a space where work by an artist like Parekowhai can come into its own?

CB. If we look at artists like Michael Parekowhai and Peter Robinson it could be said that both have moved past that post-nationalist moment, when being Maori and becoming a player in the contemporary art scene were drivers for their practices. But what was so important about their work then – which should be remembered now – as ably proved by a work like Parekowhai's *Aatarangi* (2003, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery), is that it could be read via *both* the legacy of Maori culture and history *and* the languages of contemporary art, but the two perspectives did not/do not merge; they co-existed uncomfortably, indeed could not be read simultaneously. Since that time important work has been done by people like Damian and Ngahiraka Mason to flesh out a history of contemporary Maori art which adds important knowledge that was missing previously. While such scholarship proves that cross cultural interaction between Maori and Pakeha did go in both directions it would be incorrect to suppose that the results envision a properly bicultural society in which both parties contribute equally to the nation's cultural capital. Rather, as Damian suggests there are crucial incommensurabilities that may never be resolved (as my colleague Roger Blackley sees it, we are not properly post-colonial because we are still in some sense colonial). It is these incommensurabilities – a double perspective – that I think offers much to the wider world of

contemporary art practice. This sets the stage for artists like Parekowhai and Robinson, but also for Francis Upritchard or Philip Dadson and which makes New Zealand such an interesting test case internationally.

What I think is lacking is the internal discourse that can offer nuanced accounts of what is going on now in light of the histories we are familiar with. There are local stories to tell – one of which would undoubtedly be the long history of artists who have refused New Zealand as a framing site – that need articulation, even as we embrace opportunities to operate on the world stage. And this need not only be retrospective and inward looking; what parallels are there between how New Zealand artists have had to negotiate their relations to the systems and power structures operating in the world today, and those working in other peripheral locations?

GB. On leaving New Zealand in 2005 I had choices to make as to what I brought with me to Canada, including artworks I had accumulated over the years. In making my choices I decided that the art historical significance of some works was locally defined. This is perhaps true for much art produced in the world today, a perception I have had a chance to reflect on in my role on the Curatorial Committee of the Board of the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO). As one of the largest art museums in North America the revamped AGO is internationally ambitious in the field of contemporary art. Their re-opening collection show presents major pieces by international artists with some Canadian artists woven into the exhibition – some well known internationally like Michael Snow, others not – with the aim to integrate work by Canadian artists into larger discourses. The AGO has a legacy, though, of reflecting Canadian practice overall – as evidenced by one of their galleries being devoted to the Group of Seven – and as such the majority of works acquired are Canadian. Of the artists represented, most will not have much lasting play outside Canada, even though their work may have major influence on local discourses. There are many exceptions, Jeff Wall, Stan Douglas and Rodney Graham from Vancouver among the most well known. These artists followed a very specific strategy of not being commercially represented in Canada (you have to go to New York or London to buy their work). All remain based in Canada and contribute in many ways to the development of the Vancouver scene, but their impact on art practice has been much broader. There is a specific strategy to international connectedness being employed in Vancouver that allows for and even celebrates the development of a local identity.

I was talking to Brian Butler (an LA-based gallerist who has just completed a three-year stint as Director of Artspace in Auckland) recently and he suggested that a new wave of New Zealand artists had adopted a new strategy of coming and going from New Zealand at ease; of showing locally and off-shore; being part of the world and contributing to the local at the same time. I am not that sure that this phenomenon is that new, it has been happening for a while now.

If anything I wonder if the international connectedness of New Zealand art practice is stalling after the generation epitomised by Giovanni Intra expanded the horizons. There are still important projects happening that create platforms for exchange – the One Day Sculpture Project organised by Claire Doherty among them. But we need to do more than just bring people in. Nicolas Bourriaud and others were writing about relational aesthetics long before the book of that name was published in 1998. Paris in the early 1990s was not regarded as an art centre in the same way London was, nevertheless an international grouping of artists and writers who were driven by theoretical discussions that now have had far wider impact emerged there. Both this example and that of Vancouver provide models that New Zealand could look at in furthering a strategy for international connectedness that also allows for the specifics of locality.

Robert Leonard. The current artworld dynamic certainly poses some interesting challenges for art criticism and art history. We now operate in a global art world. The old centre/periphery idea and related notions of “advanced art” don’t hold sway. Contemporary art is more pluralistic than ever, issuing from many places and conditions and incorporating diverse cultural traditions and back stories. It has also become popular – an entertainment option – with the creation of contemporary art museums and biennales in every village. Increase in the quantity of art has brought a qualitative change in the art game. There are now infinitely more players and yet contemporary art does not seem to be moving in any particular direction so much as expanding in all directions. With no centre or dominant direction, art is experienced as an immense field of practices all equally current and all relatively noteworthy. No one can have more than a passing familiarity with what’s happening; no one can be “on top of it” or “across it”. The unmappable/monstrous expansion of contemporary art generates a certain anxiety for art history and art criticism. This is expressed, for instance, in the tendency of recent biennales (like last year’s Sydney Biennale) to seek to ground contemporary art in Euro-American avant-garde precedents. Some will argue that such historicism is crucial for understanding the current moment; I think it is often an aid in misunderstanding it.

In New Zealand, the idea of “New Zealand art” – an art made by New Zealand artists in New Zealand, shown in New Zealand galleries for New Zealand audiences, purchased by New Zealand collectors and museums, written up in New Zealand journals, and about “us” – obviously doesn’t have the relevance it did in the 1960s. New Zealand art is no longer an enclosed discourse. At all levels, New Zealand artists are increasingly operating internationally, participating in discourses all over the place. This can be exciting and it can be depressing. When there was a clear centre/periphery scenario, New Zealand artists positioned themselves both in relation to the centre *hypothetically* and within their own local scene *concretely*. There was a degree of specificity to both which gave context to work and made it significant. While today it is easier to feel part of a global discussion we can also feel insignificant within it, utterly

swamped by the sheer quantity of artists in play, all producing subtle variations on what one another are doing, with little sense of potential for breakthrough. So, while we got what we asked for, it is now also easy to feel nostalgic for the days when the New Zealand art world was enclosed, intimate, self-referential; where players were acutely aware of and responsive to one another's moves; where artists' gestures were routinely significant, decisive, and transformative, even if only within our pond.

Gavin Hipkins. As we have heard, local painters now draw on a wider gamut of sources, increasingly conscious that their work must travel (symbolically and physically) across borders; New Zealand photographers visit Asian cities and package typographies as their German or American contemporaries would; our most internationally-successful artists live in Europe revealing their passports with extreme caution; New Zealand-based artists have established their personalised networks of international allies outside of previously state-authorised and controlled channels... all this and much more. It would appear, then, that we have finally broken the shackles of constrained local ambitions.

At provincial levels, the search for a Maori McCahon has failed despite desperate attempts to frame and forge a lineage. At its crudest, this rupture is most telling in the marketplace where, even before the current financial storm, cultural and capital investment in those select (male) artists emerging during the 1980s and 1990s is no longer holding up as a sure bet. In this febrile zone nothing could be riper than the wafts of cultural stagnation and falling auction reserves. Emerging artists today are feeding at this pool of rotting oils and soiled linen. This frenzy differs from my own generation's earlier suckling sessions with our dutiful appropriation games and cautiously concealed reverence for national artistic heroes: no more research trips to Cass, no more prophetic large white letters on dark backgrounds.

And with this severance, we have embraced an idea of global audience and international market and constructed an inflated notion of "our" place in the world. Have a read of Sarah Thornton's *Seven Days in the Art World* and feel part of the banquet: even if you are sitting halfway out of the marquee, you are still at the event. We are celebrating – no – insisting on participation. And why not? What better way to have your art read than alongside international peers and in relation to broader critical dialogue? Yet my nostalgia for a moment outside of the wholesale embrace of "a position" lies in my disdain for generic art. In this way, let me fully align myself with Paul Virilio when he says "globalisation is horrible". For our galleries are full of overproduced and over-refined debris that one can pick up anywhere.

It is interesting to note how frequently Michael Parekowhai's name is woven throughout our dialogue. At its most ambitious, Parekowhai's project carries an integrity that warrants the international attention that Greg argues for.

The comparison to Brian Jungen's work is poignant. While an international focus may (or may not) be slowly building for him, or other New Zealand-based artists, I would like to be quite pragmatic about our global position: from where we are the cost of travel and freight can still be prohibitive. The international curator's friend is the video artist. Consider, for example, that the three New Zealand artists included in the 2008 Liverpool Biennale (Stella Brennan, Terrence Handscomb, Lisa Reihana) all work with video. The strategy of funding artists to travel to respond to a place, or set up projectors and/or accompanying installation, is a sustainable measure in light of shrinking budgets and immovable distances. This must surely remain the case for resource-thin nations including New Zealand in achieving an international profile.

Natasha Conland. I just don't buy the notion that concepts of centre and periphery have been expelled. If anything, market imperatives have taught us that the centre's forces and their interrelationship with the market and communication flows are stronger than ever. The change is that the centre has multiplied and shifted to keep up with (largely) economic imperatives and demands. To be blatant, how do we know there is a centre or centres and that they are still contagious? Because artists still want to be there (and I agree wholeheartedly with Greg that this is not a new phenomenon). The claim that there is a new breed of New Zealanders better capable of and more prone to mobility can be made because our art history is not well writ. We lack a cogent account of the periphery which makes sense of both nationalist discourse and its reaction that might enable a history of exchange to enter popular memory. We do not yet have accounts of art in the 1980s and 1990s which attend to "alternative" practice which was geared towards challenging the legacy of a singular national cultural identity. Where is the account to support the suggestion that New Zealand engaged in a more diverse, politically-alert capacity with the discourses of post-colonialism than its neighbours for example? At a time when competition for resources is bound to intensify, New Zealand's critical voice will either be exchange-worthy or not. Right now – in the face of ardent right-wing and ultra-nationalist revival – conversations in northern Europe have turned to address questions of postcolonial critique. How can we communicate New Zealand's strong and healthy debate to contribute to these discussions?

PB. I must acknowledge Wystan's point that we are "situated" and that there is indeed a "political geography" to the globalisation of the contemporary art world. (I'm sticking with my sense of "no centre" though, because the term described a feeling, not a political geography; it did not mean no power). However, I think one aspect of our situatedness that has not been accounted for in the discussion, and which is also implicated in the globalisation of contemporary art in this country, is our place in the Pacific. Some of the artists "pushing out into the world" in the 1990s were going not to established metropolitan centres but to the islands: to Niue, Samoa, the Cooks, New

Caledonia, Hawai'i – with reciprocal visits coming in this direction as well. This is the regional version of the globalisation of contemporary art which is a relatively recent phenomenon.

The question of New Zealand's situation in the Pacific has been a crucial one for settler culture in the past as it has faced the "post-colonising" question of its distinctiveness from British and European origins and the nature of its place and history, not only here in relation to Maori and the colonisation of this land, but in the Pacific where it has played an equally significant colonial role, along with Australia, as Empire's deputy. New Zealand was a staging post in the missionisation of the Pacific in the 19th century; it held colonial administrative roles in Samoa, Niue, the Cooks, Tokelau, and elsewhere; it was a key player in the political decolonisation of the Pacific in the postwar decades; and it continues to wield political influence in the Pacific Islands where it is a major power. To bring this up to date and into the realm of contemporary art, another aspect of the 1990s – which seems to be our watershed decade for a number of reasons – was the emergence of "contemporary Pacific art" – or contemporary art by migrant artists or children of migrants whose origins lie in those former colonial territories (an ambivalent debut if you recall Jim Vivieaere's *Bottled Ocean*). Since then there has been a huge burgeoning of work made and marketed under the sign of the "Pacific" and a small but growing network of artists, galleries and institutions sprouting up in the region where they did not exist before and forging links with each other on the basis of shared aims and historical and cultural affinities.

The burgeoning of "contemporary Pacific art" is also part of the "frenzy" of contemporary art Gavin mentions: proliferating art schools, new markets, government and civic initiatives, the endless thematising of identity. New Zealand's role in the fuelling this particular phenomenon – "Leading the way in Contemporary Pacific Art" as a Creative New Zealand poster put it a few years back (meaning it was ahead of Australia) – is also problematic. *Dateline: Contemporary Art from the Pacific in Berlin* recently, for example, touted itself as the "first survey of contemporary art from the Pacific region in Germany" while actually showing artists entirely from New Zealand. And New Zealand artists similarly dominated *Paradise Now? Contemporary Art from the Pacific* at the Asia-Society in New York. This raises a host of questions about how the global art game is being played, the status of origin names like "New Zealand" and "from the Pacific", and the professionalised, "generic" nature of the contemporary art language game taught in art schools and populating galleries. One of the reasons New Zealand-Pacific artists dominate these international shows is because they've mastered that language game. If you actually "surveyed" art from the Pacific, it probably wouldn't play in Berlin or New York. But what is this saying about the homogenising effect of expanding markets for contemporary art? I'm not sure this is decolonisation and I think it is a very tricky moment to figure out in those terms.

Emma Bugden. An artist said to me the other day they had removed the word nationalism from their repertoire entirely, relying solely now on the terms “international” and “local”. It seems to me, that while agreeing with the idea of a shift from nationalism to globalism (and, yes, welcoming the move away from the recent and bombastic rhetoric about “telling the nation’s stories” – endorsement can be a tricky gift), there has also been a renewed focus on reclaiming some sense of the local or regional, in its various forms.

“Regional” (or worse, “provincial”) was for many years a dirty word, yet it is being reclaimed, often by younger artists. Witness, for example, Liz Allen’s recent Ronald Hugh Morrison project in Hawera, or indeed many of the projects we undertook when I was Curatorial Director at Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts where we found no shortage of artists interested in engaging directly with the (neither urban nor urbane) suburb of Pakuranga and its many communities.

The art world’s love of the new in all its forms has at times given New Zealand the ability to piggyback on the exotic cachet of the other (think Eastern European artists, then Asian artists, then Middle Eastern, perhaps Pacific...). Our increasing confidence internationally has also been timely and pragmatically matched with the rise of DVDs and the internet, as Gavin has already said: “the international curator’s (and New Zealand’s) friend is the video artist”. Plus, the rise of the mega-spectacle of the biennale has created demand for artists from increasingly “elsewhere”. Being on the periphery, almost, gives us leverage.

But the possibilities are double-edged. Might not the expansion of centre to peripheries be affected now by new global conditions? The increasingly strident call, particularly in Britain and Europe, for the acknowledgement of “land miles” in food production and the costs of carbon emissions could, I speculate, ultimately have special ramifications for New Zealand. Where you are from might count against us yet again, only moments after it seemed to not matter at last. Could not our distance find us re-marginalised, this time for entirely different reasons?

RL. At the risk of backtracking, I want to disagree with Wystan’s comment that the decline of the centre is a centrist myth. First, I think this idea assumes that the earlier centre/periphery idea was itself an expression of the centre. It seems to me that it was (at least) *equally* an expression of the desires of those on the periphery. Indeed, in New Zealand it always served local interests, giving our artists and artbaggers (particularly those who lamented the situation) arguments and license to do as they wanted. The centre/periphery prognosis never stopped New Zealand artists from being “internationalist”, on the contrary it empowered them to be so, even if their internationalism would never be tested by the centre. The centre/periphery idea was a convenient tool to manage our backyard and to order our own emotions.

Second, I think it is good to be sceptical about the benefits of the breakdown of the centre/periphery dynamic, but not sceptical that it has happened (perhaps we don't want to let the centre go). Late last year I was in Asia, on a biennale trek; around the same time Natasha was researching the Auckland Triennial in Tehran. In the early 1980s all that would have been unimaginable. I'm not saying that the former centre isn't important, it is, but the order of business is now fundamentally different. With globalism, distance hasn't gone away but been transformed, from something sublime and abstract to something concrete; from being insurmountable (don't bother) to surmountable (hard work).

There was always a tinge of bad faith in our anxiety over the centre/periphery situation. It gave us permission to focus on the centre and neglect other peripheral art cultures while criticising the centre for ignoring us. It permitted a daily fantasy of unrequited love, where we effectively focused on ourselves as if we were the *only* peripheral culture waiting to be recognised. It would surely come with the next McCahon export show. You could say we had a Cinderella Complex. However, the collapse of the centre/periphery logic won't automatically make New Zealand artists world-art heroes. Actually, it may just make for a bigger art world to swamp us. Perhaps New Zealand art will become less significant with globalism. Sure, we can be part of the big discussion (we aren't excluded on principle), we just have to slog it out with everyone else for attention. The crucial thing is it is a *different* big discussion.

I don't think the breakdown of the centre/periphery idea makes place less relevant, but *more* relevant. The centre/periphery idea meant we didn't have to think about the complexity of the wider world, simply about our scene and "the centre" as if they were bubbles. "The centre" was a fantasy, geographically unlocated (was it in New York or Cologne, or, indeed, in our own hearts, visible only through the frame of our desiring gaze?). But now, as we traipse across the globe armed with our Lonely Planet guides to look at and make art, we become more acutely aware of the way art is conditioned by place – geography and economics – and the logics of local scenes. The decline of the centre doesn't take away the local, but makes us appreciate it differently.

WC. There was importantly more than one model of internationalism at work in the 1970s and 1980s. The centre/periphery that pitted modernist abstraction against expressive realist landscape was seriously handicapped by its belatedness – by the time the campaign for it got underway here, the drive to forget about it was succeeding in the centre. By comparison the internationalism of local conceptual art (post object, "critical" practice) was not as fixated by the centre. The international in-put into the local scene was diverse – London, New York, South America – and the output, first through the Mildura Sculpture Triennial and subsequently ANZART, built what we described as an "off-centre" strategy precisely aimed at building long-term links with situations

where there were shared interests. The trans-Tasman exchange was then staged off-shore, at the 1984 Edinburgh Festival, in a triangulation designed to extend and complicate the model.

My own interests shifted then to Europe as a model of the international. The precondition for what we call the global art world was the transformation of the post war US/Europe, centre/periphery politics that occurred in those years. The outcome was *Under Capricorn*, a new internationalist strategy devised by John McCormack and myself for situating New Zealand to advantage within the international: the conference *Is Art an European Idea?* (1994) and *The World Over*, the exhibition we did with and at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and at the City Gallery Wellington were the two projects that eventuated. This was an international show; I curated it with a European curator but it had more New Zealanders in it than any such show before or since. Neither ANZART nor *Under Capricorn* were stunning successes, but they were a post-centre/periphery strategy and as such, in my view, still “the way to go”.

RL. Wystan, I agree. In New Zealand internationalism took different forms in different moments and in different areas in the scene. And, I wasn't seeking to diminish the role you played in forging international exchange, which I appreciate has always been concrete, measured, and *exceptionally* nuanced. My purpose was to emphasise the extent to which we New Zealanders have used the centre/periphery idea with considerable agency to structure our thinking about ourselves and the wider world, as we tried to engage with that world or retreat from it. (*Under Capricorn* and *The World Over* are exemplary here.) The idea wasn't simply foisted upon us by the centre, and, even if it was, we certainly found our own uses for it. Julian Dashper comes to mind.

As much as we have lent on the centre/periphery and internationalism/nationalism binaries they seem inherently unstable and to be constantly deconstructing, and it is perhaps this tendency rather than their clarity that guarantees their longevity. In practice the split between the internationalist and the nationalist never seems to be that clear cut. Watching Television New Zealand's recent documentary series, *The Big Picture*, it was interesting to be reminded that the nationalist Hamish Keith was at some point traipsing around New York pitching a contemporary New Zealand art show. In his TV show Keith argued that only the art made in New Zealand speaks to us of who we are, but he also roped in the authority of his slide-talk audience at New York's Museum of Modern Art and Clement Greenberg as authorities to validate his views. Similarly, for all his invective against nationalism, Francis Pound got totally bogged down in enemy territory arguing about ideas of New Zealand-ness. The more he grappled with nationalism, the sexier it became.

GH. Well I would argue that New Zealand still holds to a deeply entrenched model of nationalist representation and assumes patriotic control of

opportunities for artists. At home, the current political and funding infrastructure would simply not tolerate the equivalent of Liam Gillick representing Germany as is proposed for the 2009 Venice Biennale. I remember how suspicious New Zealand collectors (and artists) were when Hamish McKay Gallery in Wellington starting showing Australian artists on a regular basis in the early to mid-1990s. Rene Block got away with *Toi Toi Toi* (1999), in which he expanded ideas of what constituted being a New Zealand artist by unapologetically including offshore and distantly-related citizens, only because of his status as an important European curator.

I admired the selection panel for the 2nd Walters Prize at the Auckland Art Gallery when they went out of their way to throw into the mix an at-the-time relatively unknown New Zealand-born and Melbourne-based artist, Daniel von Sturmer, who went on to represent Australia at Venice in 2007. But progress beyond national borders and towards building (Arjun Appadurai's) transnational and imaginary communities (Gillick's representation is based on the persuasiveness of an ideological community) has since stalled. The 2008 Walters Prize panel selection constituted a short-sighted line up of exclusively Auckland-based artists: two of whom had already been included in the prize – within a six year period! What happened, given that there were very real alternative projects here and abroad that could have easily come into focus in that two-year period: Mike Stevenson (San Francisco), Mladen Bizumic (Vienna/Berlin), Ann Shelton (Auckland), Dane Mitchell (Rio de Janeiro)?

WC. Yes, nationalism is not finished with yet. It has recently been refreshed by Hamish Keith's *The Big Picture*, which clarified the terms by which the narrative justifies its current authority within this culture. The return of Hamish Keith to centre stage was a mark of Helen Clark's cultural policy, which was nothing if not nationalist, albeit a refurbished bicultural one. For all his claims to the contrary, Keith's is an official view. Under newly-appointed National Prime Minister John Key, will it be "atomisation" that marks official cultural policy? Is it about time that the Arts Foundation replaced Creative New Zealand?

GB. I would also want to suggest that the phenomenon of globalisation is directly linked to a neo-liberalist ideology that has promoted the unfettered flow of capital, but it doesn't necessarily follow that art in New Zealand is now globalised. My sense is that the market for New Zealand art remains largely local, although unquestionably art here responds to local and global developments (as with Canada).

RL. Gavin says New Zealand is still deeply entrenched in a model of nationalist representation. I think that needs to be qualified. It interests me that most of the people we have sent or are sending to the Venice Biennale – where an anachronistic system of national representation survives – were or are largely based offshore. Peter Robinson and Michael Stevenson were living in Berlin;

Judy Millar splits her time between here and there; and London-based Francis Upritchard visits home just enough, it seems, to still be considered a New Zealand candidate for Venice. So yes, I agree there is some nationalist idea underpinning our selections for these things, but it is always already intertwined with some kind of internationalism. What is fascinating is not that our selections are nationalist or internationalist, but how they are both at once.

CB. This is true even of a project like *Speculation*, New Zealand's unofficial contribution to the Venice Biennale in 2007, which was designed by Brian Butler in his capacity as Director of ARTSPACE as a strategic ploy to get New Zealand artists into the art world's hands by other means than the cumbersome and costly reality of a physical exhibition, after the decision was made to suspend New Zealand representation. Conceived around the conceit that when you have no money you are forced to think – a statement originally made by one of New Zealand's great thinkers, Ernest Rutherford (reprinted as the publication's frontispiece) – it showcased the work of 30 artists without any attempt to frame them in relation to their New Zealand context. Liberated from the burden of representing their culture the artists were freed to enter the flow of contemporary art seemingly seamlessly (mimicking those other flows about which Greg speaks?); the idea being that artists here are as good as anywhere; the idiosyncrasies of their takes merely adding other refrains to the practices of art making that characterise the contemporary scene today.

But *Speculation* did not disavow New Zealand identity. Rather it redeployed a version for its own ends. The publication *was* pitched as a New Zealand project and invoked one of our national heroes to deliver its message that we may be small and far away but we are all the smarter for it. Multiple and mobile, *Speculation* was “kiwi ingenuity” in another guise. If we are to make sense of our moment, it seems to me that we have to account for and evaluate not just an easy target like *The Big Picture* but also projects like *Speculation*. Discourse now seems suspended between a revived nationalism revamped in the interests of gaining advantage in a global economy where cultural distinctiveness can give us a marketing edge and a revitalised art scene that is enjoying expanded opportunities to be part of any number of art centres. The dangers of both are in the failure to acknowledge the powers that continue to position us.

CB. *We have covered a lot of ground regarding New Zealand's shifting sense of itself in the world and the playing out of nationalist and internationalist, local and global, Maori and Pakeha, insider and outsider perspectives; if you like mapping a territory for art practice as it has unfolded recently. But what is there to be said of the discursive frameworks that condition and occasion practice?*

GB. The drift in the discussion has been to characterise the current situation around dialectical tensions nationalist/post-nationalist; Maori/post bicultural and so on. I wonder how useful such polemics are in interpreting the moment

we are in. Indeed I wonder if the 1980s and 1990s did represent a moment of critical cohesion and if they did, how rooted in a post-nationalist or postcolonial discourse was that moment? You can cite artists and works that apply, but there are others: Terrence Handscomb or Darcy Lange for example. Lange was working in a very particular space activated by conceptualism, but one that also responded to the legacy of situationism, a space that allowed him to document working-class communities in Birmingham or Maori communities in Taranaki.

WC. As a critic I have an abiding scepticism if not a resistance to “discursive frames” and the governing terms to which they give rise – I try to get by without them. I gag on postmodernism not just because it is “played out” but because it always was more trouble than it was worth. I think in this way I sit between art historians, for whom the present necessarily is couched as “after the fact” and artist’s who are finding the present through making work (through their practice, as it is called). When Greg questions whether the discursive situation in the past was ever as cohesive as some have argued, the case can always be made.

But I would also say that the subject also raises the question of the conditions for discourse – the venues, occasions, and opportunities – the culture offers any one of us. At a time when the number of tertiary art programmes here and their graduating artists, the number of galleries and exhibitions, auction houses, have been steadily increasing, as have the number of art magazines and art books, there has not been a comparable growth or investment in the intensity, efficacy, complexity of the accompanying discourse. Instead, these expansions sometimes seem to compel a dumbing down, a cutting short, spreading thin, in sum entail various avoidances of discourse on the assumption that it impedes or disrupts their smooth progress.

CB. Earlier in the discussion Robert criticised art historians for possibly misrepresenting current practice by endeavouring to find a genealogy for it. This to me is provocative. On the one hand I want to disagree, basing my own work on an endeavour to write a history of what for a better term I call “critical practice” in New Zealand that can be traced back to the 1960s. This covers a great deal, looking beyond the mainstream medium of painting that has dominated accounts of art in this country, to artists who have used new and non-traditional media in self-reflexive ways that attend to the physical, social, cultural and political meanings of context, that question conventional belief in the viability of artistic expression, that seek to function in a more integrated way in the social realm by connecting with audiences or breaking down barriers between art and non art, and so on. I’m motivated by the fact that New Zealand’s version of this story is still not well known and no major text has been published that properly integrates such practices into an account of art in this country after 1960, though of course I’m heartened by a growing curiosity about this history, first witnessed in projects like *Action Replay* and *Intervention* and then more recently by the revival of interest in artists like Jim Allen, Bruce Barber and the belated attention

paid to Philip Dadson) as well as the tremendous enthusiasm of younger artists for work of this kind (I was impressed with the turnout to see Gray Nicol restage his 1979 performance *Duck Calling* and the cross-generational mix of people it attracted who were treated to a screening of his early video works – comparisons with a much younger artist like Campbell Patterson are intriguing).

But on the other I think he is right to be suspicious of endeavouring to construct a linear narrative that connects the art of the 1970s with recent work because so much has shifted, not least our relation to history (in Peter's sense the idea that we look back to see where we are), the development of a whole infrastructure that has institutionalised "critical" practice, and the emergence of a market for it. Indeed I am also suspicious of trying to tie together disparate practices on the basis that they all employ media that aren't oil on canvas (you can be a conceptual artist and still paint), which is why I'm mildly troubled by the way a range of artists from the 1970s to the present are corralled together in the recent *Digital Arts Reader* edited by Stella Brennan and Su Ballard. But in the end I do think it is important to develop narratives that bring such histories into perspective. If nothing else I think they provide a counter to dominant nationalist discourses that prove the New Zealand art scene to be far more permeable than we might have imagined and which provide a tangible precedent for what is happening now.

WC. We see the dangers for the present in simplistic teleological analyses; yet despair of coming up with adequate synchronic explanations for the expanded and accelerated condition of contemporary practice worldwide. What are the terms for and conditions that apply to the writing and publication of synchronic/diachronic accounts of the situatedness of practice here? What Tina calls a history of "critical practice" stretching back to the 1960s, is what I would simply call the history of "contemporary art" in New Zealand. I was out of the country from 1963 to 1970, during which time contemporary art was in New York mostly; it wasn't in New Zealand when I left (which was a reason for going) but when I came back, to my delight, it was here too. I say this because when I read Tina's comments I had just returned from an opening at Michael Lett of a small show of video, photography, sculpture through which the history of the contemporary resonated strongly. This spare showing of small works by Jim Allen was extremely powerful; its vitality (Allen is in his 80s) a continuing rebuke to the existing literature. The day before a young artist, showing for the first time at Starkwhite said to me: "Jim Allen, he's my hero". It is not the first time I have encountered an evident satisfaction on the part of young artists in their discovery of a local genealogy. It began, perhaps, in the 1990s with the Teststrip artist's interest in Billy Apple's New York work of the 1970s, and has notably been picked up by young curators, think of Mercedes Vicente's Darcy Lange exhibition, and Emma Bugden's current Bruce Barber show at Te Tuhi. I see this process as widely spread, and it presages a connecting of the dots. I also see it as a positive result of globalisation, of New Zealand's crossing the line into the world of contemporary art, bringing with

it the likes of Vicente, Leonhard Emmerling and Tyler Cann for whom the local genealogy represents an exciting discovery.

PB. I'd like to comment on the inadequacy of existing discourses for talking about Maori art or other discourses that presume a cultural or religious base in their own values and beliefs. Damian suggested – polemically – that Ngahiraka's cultural framework “rejects modernism – and therefore the postmodernist operations of artists like Parekowhai...”. Modernism, postmodernism and anti-modernism – these are the three broad paradigms that organise the *October* people's survey of contemporary art: *Art Since 1900*. You can be sure that the “anti-modern” in that line-up always comes off worst, the most regressive, the least rationally credible, its reactionary relationship to the modern prejudicially written into the very term. The first two always gang up on it to reinforce their progressive, critical, enlightened authority. I think Damian was expressing the frustration of that position vis-à-vis the domination of those discourses (and their refinements since their heyday). However, he and I disagree because I don't want to draw hard and fast boundaries between them. I would like better, more nuanced, less cardboard alternatives to the “anti-modern” in that triumvirate of discourses, alternatives better able to account for the sacred and the depths and capacities of believing in the act of art making and art viewing, and as a way of being in modernity, but I want to put them into dialogue or argument or some more articulate relationship to the others in which none of them is left unchallenged, if not unchanged. So I would not sympathise with a Maori art history that simply “rejects” modernism and postmodernism, especially in the case of artists like Ralph Hotere and Parekowhai. But equally, I don't want a discourse that rejects “Maori” (or similar) as a relevant, significant cultural perspective on these artists or more broadly on those larger intellectual options today.

DS. The theoretical concept I want to try out on New Zealand art is decolonisation. I'm interested in it because of its relevancy to contemporary political debates in this country, and its ability to connect art and ways of thinking and writing about art to particular struggles for justice and political representation. What I really like about a concept like decolonisation is that it connects local art to a wider story of, first, Pacific art, and then global art, since decolonisation is one of the major political and social discourses of the last 50 years. Tracking the term enables us to make sense of relationships that exist between Maori art and art institutions and other Pacific cultures (such as Hawai'i) that look to Maori as exemplars of how art can play a central role in political and cultural achievement. (One Hawaiian artist said that studying art in Aotearoa was becoming for indigenous artists like travel to London used to be for New Zealanders.) It enables us to understand how distinctive Aotearoa is compared to most other Pacific countries, where contemporary indigenous art just doesn't exist within the contemporary art world. And it forces us to consider relationships and possibilities with the rest of the globe, but not through the typical north-south axis that our culture has always adhered to.

Most exciting of all, a publication which tackles this kind of theme would be of extreme use for artists in the Pacific. It would connect contemporary artists in places where there isn't a highly developed infrastructure and theoretical discourse with the historical and theoretical tools that will be useful in their struggle to make their practice count. It would be an art history of use, a modest gesture against the prevailing power structures and a way to take part in one of the great movements of our time. But then I don't expect that this would be at all interesting to contemporary art discourse. After all, as we have noted, issues of identity and politics had their moment in the 1990s and it's surely not time for them to be fashionable again!

NC. Damian's quest for forms and tools of decolonisation interests me a great deal – however it feels utopic somehow as well. Perhaps this is also the problem of terminology – could one ever find adequate or fulsome rather than partial examples of the modern, postmodern, postcolonial? I admire immensely Bruno Latour's argument for a parliament (read dialogue) of discontent. Is it possible that agreed terminology prevents the parallel *realpolitik* of discontent which I think is of particular benefit in strengthening the discourse of the periphery?

RL. I think we need to be careful about how we apply categories from social and cultural history, like "decolonisation", to our art. The dominant narratives of social and cultural history are not necessarily, automatically, or simply the dominant narratives or concerns of art. Such master-narratives just as often obscure what's happening in art. Isn't this at the heart of the concern many of us have with *Te Papa* and *The Big Picture*, both of which suffocate art under social and cultural history, denying art any wriggle room, the chance to make its own case?

DS. I think you are right in expressing a fear of imposing concepts from politics and history onto the concerns of art. One of the things that really interests me about using decolonisation as a framework for art history is the ability of art to complicate and mess up otherwise tidy concepts. It is art's very wriggle room – the ways art exceeds and confounds the struggle of political decolonisation and denies easy or obvious definitions – that I think will prove fascinating as a way to push forward an account of cultural politics in the Pacific (and elsewhere). I'm hoping art will muddle decolonisation as much as decolonisation will order art.

GH. Given the present company, there's no need for me to point out that artists today wear many hats: educator, writer, art historian, curator, theorist, critic, filmmaker, etc. Consider the model of artist Liam Gillick. Even if, for many, who would rather this trans-professional – the creepy, schizoid character drinking too much free wine at the opening – really just went away and stopped irritating "real" artists at parties, it has to be said that we are all institutionalised fucks.

What bothers me is not that there are not any discursive frameworks but that we conform too easily to a model of critical practice that flattens our agency.

What I mean by this is illustrated at the level of graduating students from art schools. Here, Vancouver, Los Angeles, Sydney, London, and so on, it is fundamentally interchangeable. Firstly, you will note there are a lot more students graduating than you remember; double, triple, at least. You will also notice how good the work is. Most of these students will be in the “A” range. They have done a good job; the work is consciously engaged in a committed discourse, with parameters of their research and appropriately activated dramaturgy established, to just the right level, in accord with the qualification: BFA, MFA, PhD. (Original) idiosyncrasies and (actual) pathologies are neatly packaged within and tempered by finishing school: that unfortunate by-product of “crit” culture (and career-focused accountability at tertiary educational level today).

With notable exceptions, I would say that there is a similar lack of curatorial and directorial risk-taking currently operating in New Zealand’s public art galleries and museums: all the artists get a turn. There has been a trend to indulge in a cult of the new, let mid-career artists tread water, and then stage an obligatory, dutiful retrospective. (That Darcy Lange’s body of work did not receive its current critical attention while he was alive is a tragic and cruel postscript. One we too frequently repeat, as it is significantly easier than dealing with living (difficult) artists.) At a local level this levelling of opportunity and notable absence of critical dialogue and audience criticality has left us politely listening to muted voices and irritating cackle. Most distressing of all is this levelling of agency appears to be a self-regulated – even Foucauldian – set of arbitrary constraints and tailored ambitions placed on artists by themselves and their immediate peers. While New Zealand artists are doing better than we ever have on paper, there is frequently little at risk.

CB. Molly Nesbit has recently reminded us that the artist “lives somewhere else”; s/he does not harbour the same ambitions (exactly) as the historian or critic, concluding that “works of art, by and large (or should I say great works of art?), do not exist to become professional objects”.¹ Gavin’s last comments would suggest that this distinction, one that has conventionally kept artists and their exegetes apart – necessarily, fruitfully, but also antagonistically, suspiciously – may not be holding quite the way it did. I fear a new consensus founded on the professionalisation of art has left us all doing the same thing (artist’s curate, write, take the contextualisation of their practice into their own hands; writers are free to perform as wordsmiths and little more; institutions have institutionalised their own self-critique; artist-run initiatives model institutional behaviour)? Is there no “somewhere else” from which to speak? Or is that question itself naive?

WC. I agree with Molly Nesbit both about art and artists “living somewhere else” but so too does the discourse. Indeed I would like to think of the intentionally assorted nature of my “outputs” – the products of an undisciplined life – as constitutive of a somewhere else.

GB. I began curating at a time when concerns informing arts newly “expanded field” were imported into the conceptual framework of the exhibition, with the aim of activating a discursive space within which contemporary practice could engage and be engaged. These imperatives have diminished in favour of institutional and economic interests due in large measure to the onslaught of neo-liberalism. As a consequence the architecture of consumption engulfing contemporary art has produced dissonance between the stated aims of contemporary art institutions and how they actually function. The situation is further shored up by the art schools and universities in terms of their being instrumentalised to service the so-called culture industries. All of this contributes to the sense of the levelling of agency that Gavin describes, and he is right – it is a global phenomenon driven by slavish compliance to international education standards based around principles of professionalisation that inevitably lead to homogenisation.

There has been one drift in our discussions related to the usefulness of looking to the past to define our current moment, by definition a melancholic pursuit. At the moment we form an understanding about the past as a narrative, we engage a sense of loss of a moment that appears coherent but is now gone, one that accentuates the seeming incoherency of the present. For me contemporary art is defined by the act of trying to make sense of it. With this in mind I would argue that the moment a work of art becomes a professionalised object, to use Nesbit’s term, it also becomes a melancholic object.

CB. *My final question – one which is galvanising discussion in forums everywhere – is deceptively simple, but perhaps the hardest one of all. What is art for? What purpose does it serve here, now? This is the “where to from here?” question that seems to be the appropriate one for a journal the title of which is “Art Goes On”....*

GB. The question “what is art for?” begs the question “is there an answer?” It is a troubling question that reverberates around its own pre-supposition. Equally troubling is the rush of many to declare and thereby determine art’s functionality. Is there an answer? I would say that work that is contemporary is work that we all struggle to figure out. The space contemporary art potentially opens is thereby the most fertile space for criticality. Given all the constraints we have discussed is such a space still possible? There are certainly attempts by a wide range of artists and critics to open such a space – one that resists the standardisation and economic determinism brought on by globalisation, realising that such resistance is problematic and risks being co-opted by the very conditions it rails against. This is why I like Liam Gillick’s notion of “anyplacewhatever”, which Nancy Spector has used to title her current show at the Guggenheim. Gillick derived this from Deleuze in his *Theory of Cinema* where he used the term “any-space-whatever”, which explains his notion of the cinematic moment that is divorced from the rest of the narrative. This is a kind of free floating moment that links one scene to another but when isolated makes no sense. It is a moment

of pure possibility and freedom from any kind of constraints. I like this idea as a clue to the way some artists are thinking presently. It suggests a time and thereby a space that makes no sense in isolation, a moment that is also one of temporal relaxation and thereby not bound to the narrative flow.

WC. Greg's hypostatisation of the contemporary as the present moment is suspiciously Lyotardian, and maybe more useful to a viewer of Barnett Newman than of Liam Gillick. That is, there is a kind of idealisation of "the present" here such that, for my money, melancholia becomes a necessary condition of the act of viewing itself. The problem here is that the present cannot be perceived as such without some kind of cognitive frame, but narrative is not the only kind of frame we have at our disposal. There are other frames, and they need not make us sad. Further isn't there a difference between "trying to make sense" of the contemporary – the present, as such – and figuring out contemporary art? The question is, what is "art" for, and given that trying to make sense of the present may be just another expression for the daily grind and that there are many discourses which justify their activities in these terms, the question has more particularly to do with what "visual" art may contribute, what "sense" literally the art makes. Which is why Jacques Rancière's notion that art speaks to and applies leverage to the "distribution of sensible" is appealing. Contextual meaning now seems so all encompassing as to be progressively narrowing art's sphere of action and rendering all but irrelevant what distinguishes its discourse, in Rancière's terms, its relevance to the "regime of the visible".

GB. I disagree with Wystan that my position is Lyotardian and would add that my reflection on Nesbit's notion of the professional object also being a melancholic object was made in relation to reading the past as narrative. I have trouble with attempts to frame the present through narratives (such as modernism, nationalism, postmodernism etc) that rely on an idea of historical necessity, as Rancière would have it. I also have not suggested that the past no longer has anything to offer or that the contemporary is exclusively defined by the present. I have argued for the continuing currency of artists such as Darcy Lange, just as Wystan does for Jim Allen. I agree with Wystan that there are many discourses trying to make sense of the present but suggest that in the same way Rancière's idea of the "distribution of sensible" encompasses much more than visual art. Rancière argues for the co-existence of different regimes in art that are not temporally bound and so I return to my idea of temporal relaxation, a temporally unrestricted moment that makes no sense in terms of narrative. Thinking about this possibility and the idea that meaning can be released slowly over long periods gives me a means to consider why for example the work of Mallarmé continues to resonate so strongly for many artists or why they continue to explore the relationship of formative moments in modernity to the present.

NC. I too find the question, "what is art for?" troubling, as I don't believe in its utilitarian dimension. Even more so now, in our current economic climate,

the assumption is that anything not deemed as “useful” or “necessary” will go. Worse, this assumption emerges from within art’s community as an unspoken fear. As it is popularly assumed, as art has no use, it should be the first to fall and feel the crunch. But, perhaps, it does behoove us to consider art’s purpose or “presence” now more than ever, because it will go on, credit crunch or not.

It is curious that an element of “that was then this is now” has emerged in the conversation, as it’s certainly not how I would characterise my own view of art’s potential, or indeed the role of criticism/art history. Doesn’t melancholia consign us to the role of “thinker”, a vestige of modernist humanism that renders us inactive and isolated? This I think misinterprets the critic’s efficacy when dealing with the contemporary. I agree with Wytan that we work within a cognitive frame or frames, I’m just wary of the patriarchal tones of “sense-making” as a standard bearer, and certainly agreed sense.

My own involvement in contemporary art stems from my interest in “open systems” of the present, and the challenge this offers art and criticism alike. Contemporary art is itself an enormous consumer – of popular culture and historic style, of radical forms, of educative forms, of the theatrical – this is one of the reasons it has so much potential as a means to reflect on how we consume. It’s ripe for our times, and has always been so. As an artist Lise Autogena said to me last month, “I still can’t believe what a free space art is”. This wasn’t a statement of trust or utopian potential, but of the expansive possibilities of a creative form capable of dipping into the global juice like no other. I think art reminds us that consumption is not without agency. When contemporary art mines the archive it creates an agency for it in the here and now, and forces it into the “regime of the visible”.

EB. I too harbour great suspicion of the term “useful” – it is up there with that other buzzword of the moment “aspirational” in defining the worth of an action purely by outcome. This is where the dangers of aligning cultural “success” so closely to the twin towers of the nation-state and late capitalistic liberal economics comes unstuck, especially in times of economic uncertainty. I certainly don’t believe artists require harsh times to flourish, in some post-garret form of romanticism. Billy Apple’s assertion, “The artist has to live like everybody else” remains as potent as ever.

I also don’t believe that art is a luxury just for the good times. We need artists more than ever now, perhaps partly (but only partly) for art’s ability to adapt or subvert the dominant paradigm and, perhaps most “usefully”, articulate other possibilities. But art is of necessity less pointed, less direct than other forms of articulation – politics, social comment, activism, terrorism – all of these are clearer in their capture of the contemporary event as it occurs. For me it is art’s very “uselessness” – or perhaps what Rancière talks of as “undecided”, and the capacity of art to oscillate between states that are powerful. Art is a form of

resistance which is slippery, difficult, sometimes hopeless, and necessary because of this. I agree that the contemporary, as Greg points out, contains within it the past as well. What is, perhaps distilled within the contemporary moment in art is a form of uncertain reflexivity which is constantly questioning itself and us. It is political, yet not; alert, yet not.

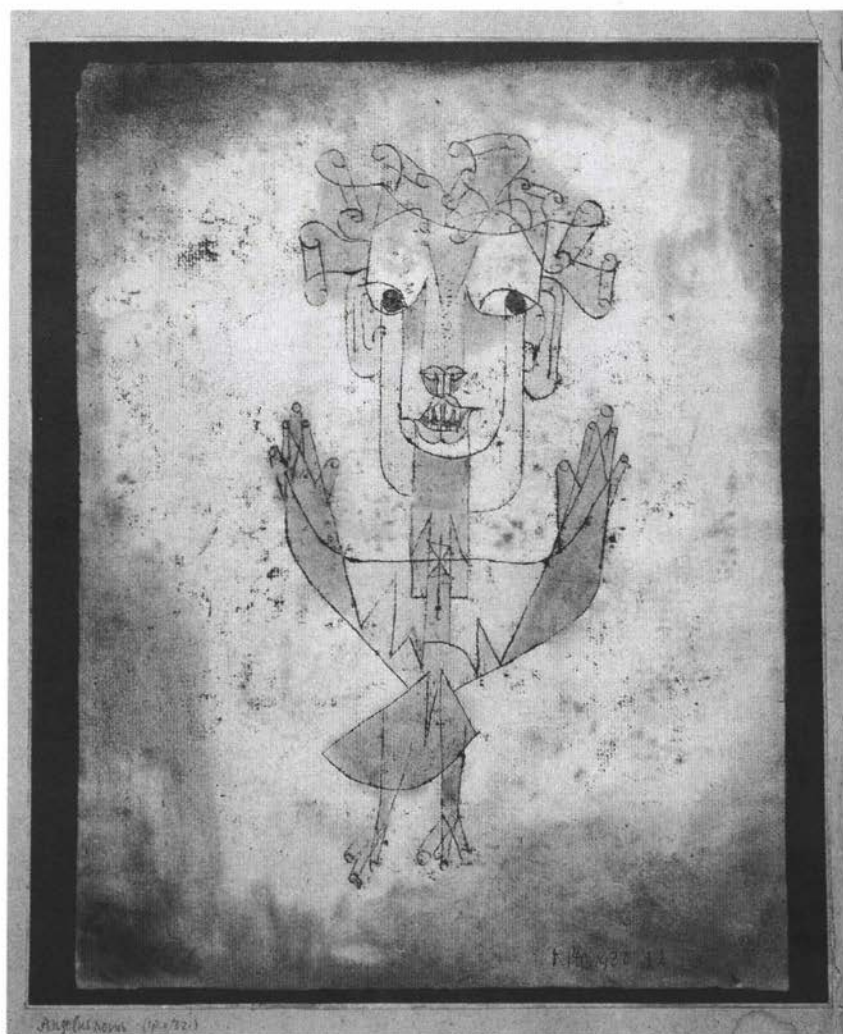
PB. As an art historian, I'm a little concerned about the suspicion of the value of narrative to contemporary art. I could be out of a job! But seriously, the call for a "temporal relaxation" and the reference to "co-existing regimes of art that are not temporally bound" make sense as concepts to accommodate the enigma of contemporary art and the irresolution of the present – as people are saying. But they also sound like terms that mean to evade the historical conditions of those very regimes. In the old days of modernism, the dialectical necessity of making contemporary art "a thing of the past" was precisely how art "went on". "Not being able to make a previous moment of high achievement part of the past – not to lose it and mourn it and, if necessary, revile it – is, for art in modernist circumstances, more or less synonymous with not being able to make art at all." The counterpart to "art goes on" is "art becomes history" – but maybe we don't mean it in that sense at all but rather like an activity amongst other activities that "go on", that is simply occur. I hope this is not the case because there is a lot at stake in eventually articulating the historicity of contemporary art, whatever the challenges in adequately doing it.

NC. I too feel anxious (perhaps the wrong word), "hopeful" that we'll find other terms to discover arts explorative energy, which sit alongside its mere "going along". I think one of the problems in inheriting Modernism's generation of the present into the past, as Peter mentions, is that we no longer have the language to describe how art "adventures" without a forward momentum implied... and yes, the risk that adventure often requires. I'm curious to bring classic utopian ideas of expansion and exploration together with a modernist idea of growth, to see how they might layer over the deadpan present and provide contradictory options which are so necessary for our present condition

GB. And a final salutary comment: I run a gallery that uses ideas like "experimentation" and "risk taking" in its mandate, terms that have lost value as they have become increasingly ubiquitous – even mainstream. Now at this moment of dramatic economic downturn, the context for risk taking changes. As we can intuit from the sudden and massive reduction in advertising in *Artforum*, jobs and livelihoods are on the line.

1. Molly Nesbit, "Responding: questions of perspective," in *Women Artists at the Millennium*, eds Carol Armstrong and Catherine de Zegher (Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, 2006), 123.
2. T. J. Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), 371.

Fig.1
Paul Klee
Angelus Novus 1920
Watercolour
Israel Museum, Jerusalem



Divine Violence Imagined by Contemporary Artists

Terry Smith

Walter Benjamin's theses on the philosophy of history were his last substantial writings, composed in Germany, France and Spain between February and May of 1940 while he was on the run – as he feared, and as it turned out – for his life. The ninth thesis begins with a passage from a poem, *Greetings from Angelus* written by his friend the Talmudic scholar Gershon Scholem on 15 July 1921, Benjamin's 29th birthday.

My wing is poised to beat
but I would gladly return home;
were I to stay to the end of days
I would still be this forlorn.¹

These lines are a direct response to a watercolour by Paul Klee, which Benjamin goes on immediately to evoke:

There is a painting by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. It shows an angel who seems about to move away from something he stares at. His eyes are wide, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how the angel of history must look. His face is turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before us, he sees only single catastrophe, which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it at his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise and has got caught in his wings; it is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm drives him irresistibly into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows toward the sky. This storm is what we call progress.² (Fig. 1)

The watercolor was painted in 1920, transposed from a drawing via an oil tracing. Benjamin bought it from its first exhibition in 1921, and owned it for

a number of years, displaying it in his Munich apartment, thus occasioning the poem. During this period, he attempted, unsuccessfully, to launch a critical journal named *Angelus Novus*.

For Klee, this image was one of a pair. Its partner was the watercolour *Airplane Crash*, a cluster of flag, spore and dart-like forms descending from a spotted space, all of which converge on a plummeting German fighter aircraft. It is an image of implosive destruction, drawn from memories of the artist's wartime job: photographing wreckages. In his diaries in 1915 Klee noted his reactions to the world shattered by war: "in the great pit of forms lie broken fragments."³

The body of the angel in the 1920 watercolour is an elaboration of an inverted airplane figure, its wings turned upwards into arms with five open fingers on each, its tail into a large head made up of a very fresh, open face topped with whirling, scroll-like locks. Light pinks and warm yellows suffuse the image, making these locks almost golden. The angel looks youthful, as suspended between genders as it hesitates between childhood and maturity. Yet, being an angel, it is ready to depart from human time, to lift up and move out, taking, perhaps, human souls with it.

In 1920, Benjamin may well have seen *Airplane Crash*, hanging in the same gallery, perhaps opposite or beside *Angelus Novus*. His remarks written 20 years later may have been shaped by memories of this pairing, itself a prefiguration of his present situation. His comments are an instance of what he named "the dialectical image", the necessary mutuality between representation and reality, one that, occurring disjunctively, exposes the operations of the dialectic in history. By 1940 as Europe tumbled into the black hole of barbarism, Benjamin was imagining all mankind as that viewer. Or, at least, as toilers who cannot save ourselves from generating the destruction that we lay – as our impossible offering, seeking an intercession that this offering itself makes impossible – at history's feet. No wonder he saw the angel as shrinking back in confusion.

In the last of his theses on the philosophy of history, the 18th, Benjamin evoked the ultimate world historical image of humankind's relative insignificance in this quotation:

'In relation to the history of all organic life on earth,' writes a modern biologist, 'the paltry fifty-millennia history of home sapiens equates to something like two seconds at the close of a twenty-four-hour-day. On this scale, the history of civilised mankind would take up one-fifth of the last second of the last hour.'

He then concluded with the other side of what becomes, in the pairing, a dialectical image:

Now-time, which, as a model of messianic time, comprises the entire history of mankind in a tremendous abbreviation, coincides exactly with the figure which the history of mankind describes in the universe.⁴

On this reading, the angel is the figure of *Jetztzeit*, now-time, absolute contemporaneity, that of all kinds of being in time, above all their co-presence to each other within the same, shared time of contemporaneous being.

In case his meaning was not clear, Benjamin added two brief appendices, both concerned principally with what the messianic means to the historical materialist (who does not retreat into recognising the past “as it really was” but “appropriates a memory as it flashes up in a moment of danger”). This kind of historian would cease “to tell the sequence of events like beads on a rosary”, would “grasp the constellation into which his era has entered” and thus establish “a conception of the present as now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time.” Benjamin reminds us of the Torah and the prayers prohibiting Jews from inquiring into the future because “every second was the small gateway in time through which the Messiah might enter.” The future, he ruefully notes, has always punished them for this (mistaken, he implies) belief.⁵ Of course, Benjamin no more believed in the likelihood of the appearance of an actual Messiah than he did in angels. The messianic force in his thinking was the European working classes, their revolutionary energy. For Derrida, the messianic (*sans* Messiah) was implicit in all thinking about time, especially about historical unfolding.⁶

What might the angel of history see if it looked at the world today? At the Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Switzerland, there is an exhibition entitled *Lost Paradise – The Angel’s Gaze*, in which a number of artists have been invited to image exactly that. Steiner and Lenzlinger fill a corridor with actual entanglements, inviting us to imagine ourselves as spectral figments blown through time. Zentrum publicity described this work as an:

excrecence of a plant-like work consisting of leaf-laden bowers, distressed fruit and award-winning apples, with arboreal eruptions, irregular lights and samba merry-making till girls, crystal growths, deer antlers and hydrangea, horse manure-like tubers, funny looking shriveled cacti, flying seeds and bluebells fashioned out of Novilan. This space-filling, intermingled amalgamation of an installation can be seen proliferating along the Zentrum Paul Klee’s Museum Street, out into Paul Klee’s Enchanted Garden and down to the Lost Paradise.⁷

Other artists show a war-ravaged landscape, increasingly familiar along the borders of Europe, in which both the machines and monuments of modernity have fallen victim of its urge to self-destruction. Photographer Sebastião Salgado depicts a child whose face, symbolising innocence shocked by experience, mirrors that of the Angel itself. *Angelus Contempus* might be a suitable title for this image.

But these imaginings, however emotionally engaging, are limited in at least one important sense. They conceive the viewer as a single spectator, standing alone before phenomena of unfathomable complexity. In such a double bind, there is no way out, forward or back, or sideways – no passage, as Benjamin would say. We need to see the bigger picture, to be able to imagine ourselves, others and institutions within it, before we can identify the potentialities for civil society and for a cosmopolitan ethics within it.

Perhaps a chart that sets out the forces in play would help bring this picture into focus. It is neither “objective” nor in any sense complete. Rather, it begins to imagine an array for the concepts and realities that concern us.

**1. CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL CIRCULATIONS:
FORMAL AND INFORMAL**

Globality, Planetaryity, Contemporaneity	International law, rights, social movements, lawfare
Regionality	Contestation, co-operation
States	“Rogue states”, shadow governmentalities, resistance
Markets exchanges	Globalisation, quasi- and illegal economies, informal
Civil society	Local, national, global
Symbolic exchanges (media, art, architecture, literature, etc.)	Informal associations
Actors/agents/members:	Populations, subjects, citizens, consumers, affiliates, tribes, families, selves

One way of reading this chart is exemplified by *New York Times* columnist Thomas L. Friedman’s characterisation of the current economic crisis. Linking Wall Street mortgage brokers who gave subprime loans to banks everywhere that now refuse to lend out of fear of every other bank’s toxicity, thus causing certain national economies to collapse, first in Iceland, where British police forces had invested but now must cut their street patrols, he concludes: “And therein lies the central truth of globalisation today: We’re all connected and nobody is in charge.” His best guess as to the fall-out? Strong companies will buy the weak ones, and, “once the smoke clears, I suspect we will find ourselves living in a world of globalisation on steroids – a world in which key global

economies are more intimately tied together than ever before.”⁸ This is what I call “flat theory”: it mistakes a representation for a reality in the same way that, introducing his book *The World is Flat*, Friedman pictures himself stunned into the realisation of “flatness” by seeing an array of feeds from offices all over the world displayed on a bank of television monitors in a communications company headquarters in Mumbai.⁹ More seriously, he assumes that globalisation is the only player that there is, and that it is implacably, and infinitely, encompassing in its top-down spread.

If, however, we invert this chart we see something quite different: power and connectivity emerging from the bottom-up as individuals converge their interests to create civil institutions and networks. From this perspective – that of resistance and revolution – globalisation is just one of the many sets of forces operative in the world today, powerful but not all-encompassing, and, arguably, diminishing in its reach. This reading of the current economic meltdown is at least as plausible as Friedman’s.

2. CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL CIRCULATIONS: ANTINOMAL FLOWS

Actors/agents/members:	Selves, families, tribes, affiliates, consumers, subjects, citizens, populations
Symbolic exchanges (media, art, architecture, literature, etc.)	Informal associations
Civil society	Local, national, global
Markets	Globalisation, quasi- and illegal economies, informal exchanges
States	“Rogue states”, shadow governmentalities, resistance
Regionality	Contestation, co-operation
Globality, Planetarity, Contemporaneity	International law, rights, social movements, lawfare

Yet there is another, more nuanced, view. I ask you to imagine the elements in this chart as if in fact they were points on a matrix that is configured by nodes of connections between antinomies that move in multiple directions at once, alongside and through each other, contemporaneously, such that each of these elements may come into adjacency with any other, interact with it, or pull away

from it... Above all, the flows between these vectors travel in a variety of ways, never in singular directions except when an effort is made – as it so disastrously was in, for example, the US war against Iraq – to apply huge, singular force in an effort to obliterate what the leaders of the US Emperium felt to be an intolerable complexity. In today's conditions, however, reductiveness will always fail.

Let us take one key element, the idea of “civil society”. Usually conceived as existing somewhere between “the state”, “the market” and “the family”, but not identical with any of these, it is widely regarded (especially by those who favor democracy) as essential to overcoming the natural tendency of states towards institutionalisation, conformity and stasis, of markets towards manipulation and self-interest, and that of families towards narrowness, group interest and self-perpetuation. Trade-offs between these three fundamental formations, made with good will, may create kinds of “thick” civility that benefit everybody – indeed, they may create genuine participatory democracy, the people governing themselves on an everyday basis through affiliative arrangements, invented at their own volition, and adapted by mutual agreement.¹⁰

Clearly, this is an idealistic conception of civil society. Its shape will vary depending on local conditions and the global positioning of a given culture. There have been leaders of social democracies, such as Margaret Thatcher of Great Britain, who dismissed the idea of “society” as such: it was civil society that she had in mind, and she actively closed down its fragile quasi-institutions, such as those of local government. In the US, the Republican Party achieved power in the 1980s, and effectively retained it until quite recently, by aggressive partisanship in political forums, by dividing public sphere debate along strict ideological lines, by allocating voters to “red” or “blue” states – or, as a recent vice-presidential candidate put it, “pro-America Americans” and “others”. These tactics have destroyed much of what counts as civil society in the US, once its national pride, the “human face” of its commitment to capitalism, the “values” core of its once-mighty, now imploding military-industrial complex. In such a context, it is no surprise that millions flocked to the campaign of presidential candidate Barack Obama. While the election campaign became a largely conventional, partisan dogfight, in its early phases it was motivated by nothing less than the most idealistic intentions to overcome the divisions of the Bush years, to reinvent the country as a civil society – indeed, for government to become an arm of such a society. Part of this dream is that the US should conduct itself abroad as if it were part of a *global* civil society. These are great aspirations: the world waits to see how they make their ways through the iron maw of entrenched interests and the reality-checks of severe economic downturn.¹¹

Elsewhere, the ideal of civil society has even greater urgency. When thinking of Africa, for example, the preferred, hopefully progressive opposition is usually drawn between “the state” and “the tribe”. But, as anthropologist James Ferguson observes, in practice most thinkers move quickly from definitional

generalities, such as the state, conceived as occupying the upper and more powerful reaches of the hierarchy, to low-level, relatively powerless specifics – usually small, grass-roots, voluntary organisations. The problem is that this not only perpetuates a mythic structure of power, it leaves out everything in between, and, if we take my second chart as a matrix, everything all around. Ferguson asks some hard questions:

Is the Anglo-American Corporation of South Africa part of this ‘civil society’? John Garing’s army in Sudan? Oxfam? What about ethnic movements that are not opposed to or prior to modern states, but (as so much recent scholarship shows) produced by them? What about Christian mission organizations, which are arguably more important today in Africa than ever but are strangely relegated to the colonial past in the imagination of much contemporary scholarship? All of these phenomena fit uncomfortably into the state-versus-civil-society-grid and indeed cannot even be coherently labeled ‘local,’ ‘national,’ or ‘international’ phenomena. Instead, each of these examples, like much else of interest in contemporary Africa, both embodies a significant local dynamic and is indisputably a product of powerful forces, national and global.¹²

He goes on to ask some even harder questions. Such as: how did Sudan achieve, according to the World Bank in 2002, an 8.1% annual GDP growth rate during the 1990s “not withstanding one of the most brutal and intractable wars in recent memory”?¹³ His answer: selective investment by foreign companies and governments interested in maximum returns. His conclusion:

where capital investment is heavily concentrated in mineral extraction, where domestic markets are of little value, and where stable national-level political order becomes difficult or expensive to achieve... political disorder, endemic private violence, and the reliance on a patchwork of privately secured enclaves might well become (as they have in many African nations), not temporary irruptions, but long-term features of the political landscape.¹⁴

When there is no conception of civil society in the mix, the result is thin, not thick, social fabric – a polite way of saying: natural wastage, inhuman violence and widespread disease, starvation, death.

These descriptions of the actual state of affairs in many parts of Africa are present in many other places in the world today – Iraq, Myanmar, Palestine, to take a range of examples. They give the lie to the rosy picture painted by brilliant optimists such as Hans Rosling, professor of global health at the Karolinska Institute, Sweden, who argues that a review of world economic and health statistics shows that the “developing world” is not sliding into an abyss relative to the West, but instead “most of the third world is on the same trajectory toward health and prosperity,

and many countries are moving twice as fast as the west did.”¹⁵ He claims that, on these criteria, Africa is improving at a faster rate than most Western countries did during their 300 year long rise to their current levels. This hope is expressed in the statement of United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon: “Together, by stepping up efforts to reach the Millennium Development goals throughout the continent, we can and must make the 21st century the African Century.”¹⁶

Certainly, according to the UN’s own Department Economic and Social Affairs 2008 report *Trends in Sustainable Development: Africa*, 10 non-oil producing countries joined the five oil-producing ones in achieving higher than 5% growth rates. And conflict has declined from its 1995 peak. Yet Rosling’s diagram itself shows that African countries cluster overwhelmingly in its lower reaches, with the annual income in Burundi at \$100 a year. In 2004, 41% of sub-Saharan Africans were living on less than \$1 a day.

To me, the real flaw in these globalising attempts at global picturing is that they continue to insist that all of humanity, and the planet itself, are going forward, however unevenly, in the same general direction as a direct result of the underlying success of the current global economic and political system. They acknowledge but downplay, as regrettable and unpredictable side effects, the plain facts that inequity, division and conflict are accelerating rapidly, and that their institutions (military, governmental, economic) are becoming less and less able to deal with the crises that they keep on generating. This is a scintillating house of cards. Right now, it seems to be imploding in a spectacular fashion.

How might civil society and public cultures be imagined differently?

One way of asking this question concretely might be this: what would Benjamin’s Angel see if it were to cast its gaze towards contemporary art? If it, like most people, were attracted first by the most famous and celebrated art, it would see something like Jeff Koons’ *Puppy* installed at the entrance to Frank Gehry’s Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, since 1997. Uncannily, this is a mirror of Klee’s image, although in reverse. In this case, a cute, bland and unseeing angel stands guard in front of a building conceived precisely as a pile-up of spatial forms, a wreckage that – without irony or a whiff of self-critical doubt – signals the extravagance of the late modern era, of cultural capital triumphant. This is the art and architecture of spectacle society, the culmination of rampant globalisation, that reached its apogee just before the eruption on 9/11 but kept its illusions alive until the bubble burst in 2008. This kind of art has nothing to tell us about contemporary potentialities for civil society and for a cosmopolitan ethics within it: its relevance is as a counter-example.

In contrast, a number of other artists have understood the impacts of decolonisation and the emergence of a postcolonial constellation. Their art is dedicated to showing us what is happening in the wider world today.

Sometimes, they are able to point out ethical pathways through its tangled but readable complexities. Their number is increasing, indeed so much so that some (for example, August 2008 issue of *Art in America*) are speaking of a “political turn” in contemporary art worldwide. I will examine the work of some of these artists in the remainder of my remarks.

San Francisco-based artist Daniel Joseph Martinez is an avid reader of Walter Benjamin, particular his 1927 essay “Critique of Violence” where he warns of the coercive powers underlying all state formations, that the legal system is dangerous: “Its power is formless, like its nowhere-tangible, all-pervasive, ghostly presence in the life of civilised states.”¹⁷ To him, violence is not to be contrasted with democracy, nor does it have any regard for the balance of power. Rather, it has an implacable logic of its own: “... from the point of view of violence ... there is no equality, but at most equally great violence.”¹⁸ A consequence of this is that state violence can only be met by a greater violence, that of revolution, “the revolutionary killing of the oppressor.”¹⁹ This righteous anger Benjamin labels “divine violence”.

For a number of years Martinez has been compiling a list of “all the groups in the world that have attempted, or are currently attempting, to enforce politics through violence in the 20th and 21st centuries.” He has collected over 1,700 to date. Exhibited at the 2008 Whitney Biennial, his installation *Divine Violence* consists of 121 uniform wooden panels, each sprayed with gold automotive paint and printed with the name of one of the organisations on his list (Col. pl. 2). Here are some:

26th of July Movement (Cuba); Al Qaeda (Global); Abu Sayyaf, Sword of God (Philippines); Baader-Meinhof, Rote Armee Fraktion (Germany); Central Intelligence Agency (USA); Euzakadi Ta Askatasuna, Basque Fatherland and Liberty (Spain); Falintil, The Armed Forces for the National Liberation of Timor Leste (East Timor); Generation of Arab Fury (Iran); Haganah, The Defence (Israel); Iduwindi Youths (Nigeria); Jaish-e-Mohammed, Army of Mohammed (Pakistan); KGB (Soviet Union); Laos Liberation Army (Laos); Los Macheteros, Machete Wielders (Puerto Rico); Nuclei for Promoting Total Catastrophe (Greece); Oromo Liberation Front (Ethiopia); Parti pour la Libération du Peuple Hutu (Burundi); Rahanweyn Resistance Army (Somalia); Sendero Luminoso, Shining Path (Peru); Tontons Macoutes (Haiti); Umkhonto we Sizwe, Spear of the Nation (South Africa); Venceremos, We Will Win (Venezuela); The White Eagles, Beli Orlovi (Serbia); Zimbabwe African National Union (Zimbabwe).

This accumulation of both strange and familiar names is oppressive. The room evokes honour society walls, donor plaques and crematoria. It becomes a house of memory, a record of short-term thinking and a testament to the

Fig. 2

Daniel Joseph Martinez
*Call Me Ishmael or The
Fully Enlightened Earth
Radiates Disaster*

Triumphant 2006

Installation view, Official
United States Pavilion,
2006 Cairo Biennial,
Cairo Museum of Art
Silicon over fibre glass
skeleton, animated using
computer-controlled
pneumatics

Photograph courtesy of
the artist and The Project,
New York

Collection of the artist

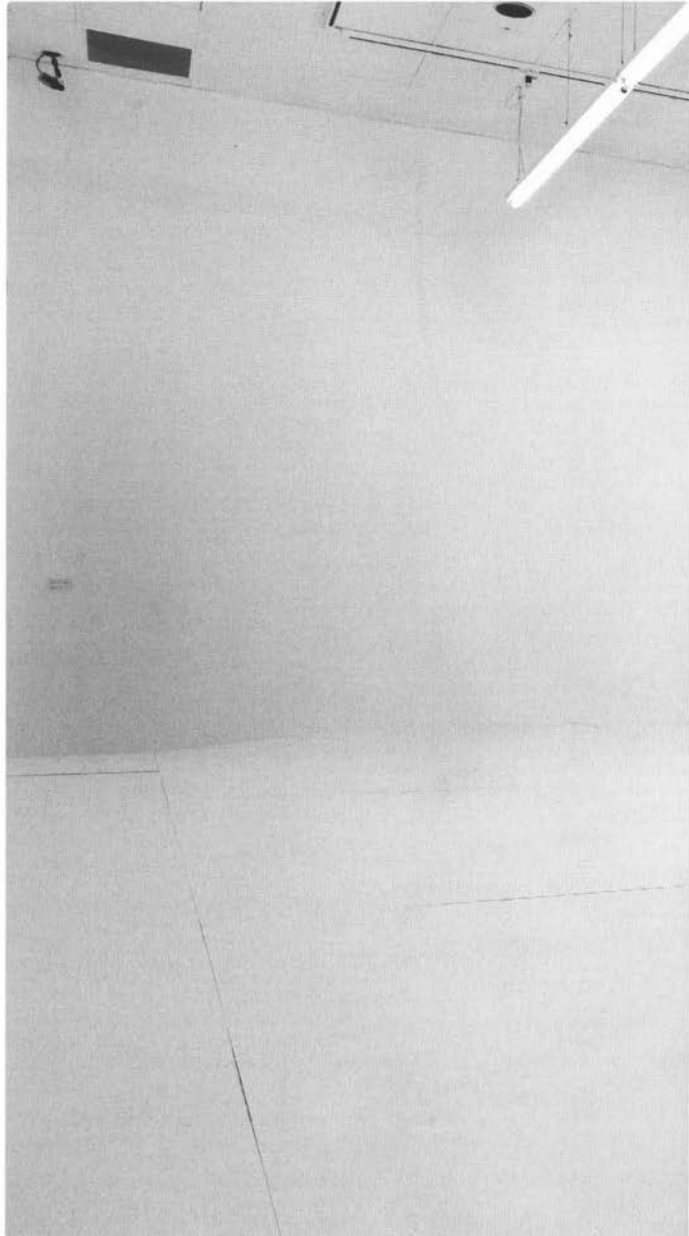




Fig. 3
Jane Alexander
Security/Segurança 2006
Components: double
diamond mesh fence; razor
wire; steel; Brazilian earth;
germinating/growing/
dying wheat; 1000
machetes; 1000 sickles;
1000 used South African
worker's gloves
Outer fence 12 x 6 metres,
inner fence 10 x 4 metres
Guards: Fabio Silva, André
Luiz Marianno, Flávio de
Jesus Bastos, Joeferson
Goss Oliveira, Alessandro
Messias da Rocha
Photo: Juan Guerra



failure of idealism. It becomes a golden cage of the present, because many of these organisations are still active, still deadly, despite their evident shortcomings. And it becomes a hall of witness to a future that will, in all likelihood, be the same.

Martinez was chosen for the US Pavilion at the 10th International Cairo Biennale, 2006. To the credit of all concerned he showed *The Fully Enlightened*

Earth Radiates Disaster Triumphant, a prosthetic humanoid, modelled on the artist himself, that lies prone on the floor of a pristine white room yet is programmed to make severe jerking movements, as if in paroxysm (Fig. 2). A Hip-Hop belt flashes “his” name: Ishmael, a figure contested by all religions. Visitors sense that their presence may be the cause of the movements, or that they have stumbled across a victim of prolonged torture and isolation. In the US Pavilion, this feeling of course evokes the military detention centers at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib, places that the US government has declared beyond the reach of both US and international law. Such perversions of the very idea of democracy are inevitable when the imperatives of corporate capitalism come to dominate state policy. Martinez’s convulsing figure makes the actuality of these places unavoidably vivid.²⁰ Perhaps this is a more accurate picturing than Salgado’s of the *Angelus Contempus*?

Other artists are bearing witness to these efforts by states to place their citizens, and citizens of other states, beyond the pale of civility. South African sculptor Jane Alexander contributed a powerful installation entitled *Security*, 2006, to the 27th São Paulo Biennial, Brazil, in 2007 (Fig. 3). Inside a wire fence she laid out wheat, 1000 machetes, 1000 sickles, 1000 used workers gloves. Outside the perimeter stood five Brazilian men dressed in South African private security uniforms. Inside the cage, a creature hovered: part bird, part animal, part man, and part manikin. Partly formed, its legs buckled in deformity, its eyes alert but its arms/wings removed. A striking embodiment of the idea of bare life. Another *Angelus Contempus* (Col. pl. 1).

While these artists serve humanity by showing us our abuses of our humanity, others seek pathways through the complexities of the present. In his installation *Cavemanman*, presented in various iterations from 2003 (Barbara Gladstone Gallery, New York) to 2008 (Carnegie International, Pittsburgh), Paris-based Swiss artist Thomas Hirschhorn conjures up an environment into which those of us subject to the forces of globalisation might retreat in order to replenish our energies by reading key texts about revolutionary possibility and “divine violence”. This is Plato’s cave, within which global shadows flicker, but from which we can escape towards enlightenment of revolutionary action. What might this mean, in concrete terms? *Bataille Monument*, a work created for Documenta 11 in Kassel in 2002, included a service whereby young men (new angels?) from the Turkish district of the city drove visitors to their area so that they could experience something, however transitory, of life in that district, including the services such as libraries that Hirschhorn and volunteers created for them (Fig. 4).²¹

Civil society is not an abstract idea, an ideal to be visited at one’s convenience, nor imposed upon people whatever their cultural histories or personal predilections. It is a reality that comes into being whenever humans gather together in at least the minimal conditions of freedom. The Turkish artist Kutlug Ataman,

in his 2004 video installation *Kuba*, captures this truth poignantly, at the discrete distance that museums can sometimes provide. “Kuba” is the name of a part of Istanbul inhabited by illegal immigrants (mostly Kurdish), criminals, the homeless and others who do not wish to be part of the city’s official *polis*. Ataman interviewed 40 of them, asking about their daily lives, their interests, their concerns, and their views. Editing himself out of the videos, he broadcasts each of the tapes on an individual television monitor, in front of which the viewer sits, for about a half hour in each case. Wherever the installation is mounted, the monitors and the chairs are chosen so as to be local, cheap and comfortable. Watching the videos, listening to the conversations, one is struck by the energy and the ingenuity of the individual inhabitants, but even more so by the warts and all sense of equity that seems to pervade the community that they have created. An engagingly direct demonstration of what civil society might look like (Fig. 5).

Now, after 1989, after 2001, in the meltdown of 2008, we might see Klee’s figure less as Modernity’s spectral mirror, less as the Angel of the New, more as a new angel, a novice at the business of passaging, wondering whether that indeed should be its role, anxiously and perhaps naively facing ... what? The storm of progress continues to blow through us, dangerously. The new storms that offered to sweep us all, together, globalised at last, up into better worlds, have succeeded only in making more of us more aware of our disparities. Old storms, arising from earlier visions of paradise, have returned, often as tornados, yet they are joining into vast currents that seek to blow us all backwards, to their sources. The planet itself is generating its own storms, well-known ones and new kinds, both occurring with, it seems, a fury unprecedented in human histories.

We might be this angel now, opening ourselves to the kinds of question that, I believe, urgently need to be asked now. Not new questions, but old ones, newly configured:

What is it to be human, or an animal these days? What is it to be a thing, an organisational form or a planetary process? What is to be each and all of these, distinctively yet together, civilly, contemporaneously?

From a paper presented at “Formations of Global Civil Society and Domains of Public Culture,” Plenary Sessions of the Gwangju Biennale, held at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, People’s University of China, Beijing, October 28–November 1, 2008, organised by Okwui Enwezor, Gao Minglu and Xu Bing.

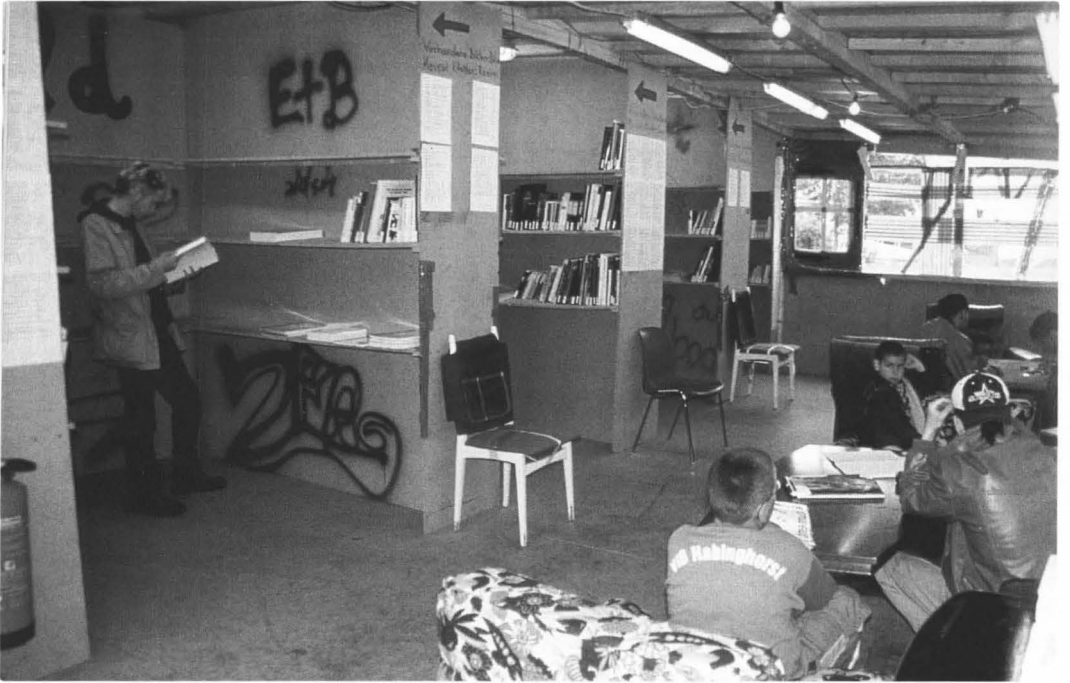


Fig. 4
Thomas Hirschhorn
Bataille Monument 2002
(Library)
Documenta 11, Kassel, 2002
Courtesy Gladstone
Gallery, New York
Photo: Werner Maschmann



Fig. 5
Kutlug Ataman
Küba 2004
Installation at the Old
Sorting Office, London,
2005
40 monitor video
installation
40 parts, each 35-75
minutes, edition of 5
Commissioned and
produced by Artangel
Photo: Thierry Bal

- Gershon Scholem, *The Fullness of Time: Poems*, trans. Richard Sieburth (Jerusalem: Ibis Editions, 2003).
- Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," 1940, *Gesammelte Schriften I* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974), 691–704. This translation by Harry Zohn, from *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings, Vol. 4: 1938–1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 392–93.
- These works are placed in their context by O.K. Werckmeister, *The Making of Paul Klee's Career 1914–20* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 237–242. Werckmeister argues strongly for Klee's movement away, during these years, from his earlier overtly political orientations.
- "On the Concept of History," in *Walter Benjamin, Selected Writings, Vol. 4, 1938–1940*, trans. Edmund Jephcott et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 396.
- "On the Concept of History," 397.
- See especially Jacques Derrida, *Memoires: For Paul de Man* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo, *Le Religion* (Paris: Seuil, 1996).
- Zentrum Paul Klee Bern, "Lost Paradise – The Angel's Gaze", 2008, http://www.paulkleezentrum.ch/www/en/pub/web_root/pro/wechselausstellungen/archiv/lost_paradise_der_blick_des.cfm. Another current response is the music video by Billie Cameelion, *Angelus Novus*, added to YouTube November 15, 2006, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mpWuouixFGU>, that uses animation of the Klee watercolor, collaged with cut up images of roses and stone fragments, all projected onto a screen-like surface, with intertitles from the text of "On the Concept of History" and sound provided by an Akebosi song.
- Thomas L. Friedman, "The Great Iceland Meltdown," *New York Times*, October 19, 2008, WK13.
- Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat* (New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2005), 5–8.
- Drawn from the websites of Civil Society International and the Centre for Civil Society at the London School of Economics.
- Among many acute characterisations of these developments, I draw attention to The Editors, "The Talk of the Town: Comment, The Choice," *The New Yorker*, October 13, 2008, 51–58.
- James Ferguson, *Global Shadows: Africa in the Neoliberal World Order* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 98–99.
- Ferguson, *Global Shadows*, 196.
- Ferguson, *Global Shadows*, 208–9.
- TED: Ideas Worth Spreading, "Hans Rosling: Global Health Expert, Data Visionary," http://www.ted.com/index.php/speakers/hans_rosling.html.
- Cited United Nations, Department Economic and Social Affairs, *Trends in Sustainable Development: Africa* (New York: United Nations, 2008), via http://www.iisd.ca/publications_resources/sust_dev_t.htm. Statistics in this paragraph from this report.
- Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," *Reflections* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986), 287.
- Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 297.
- Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," 298.
- On Martinez see Gilbert Vicario, *The Fully Enlightened Earth Radiates Disaster Triumphant Daniel Joseph Martinez United States Pavilion 10th International Cairo Biennale 2006* (Houston: Museum of Fine Arts, 2006) and "Daniel Joseph Martinez with Hakim Bey," *interReview* 2, no. 8 (2008), 28–37, and related essays 35–50.
- See Thomas Hirschhorn et al., *Thomas Hirschhorn* (London: Phaidon, 2004). Discussed in, among many others, Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "An Interview with Thomas Hirschhorn," *October*, no. 113 (Summer 2005), 77–100, and Timo Kappeler, "Institutional Memory: documenta's Remembrance and Forgetting: An Analysis of Works by Joseph Beuys and Thomas Hirschhorn," in Arthur Engelbert, Maïke Pagel and Wolf Borchers, *Culttrans: Views on Art* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005).



TOP
Fig. 1
Pierrot le fou 1965
Film still
Dir. Jean-Luc Godard
Rome-Paris Films/
Dino de Laurentiis
Cinematografica

BOTTOM
Fig. 2
Senso 1954
Film still
Dir. Luchino Visconti
Lux Film

Ruinous Sequels

Adrian Martin

The World is Not Enough

The great traditional cinema means Visconti as opposed to Fellini or Rossellini. It is a way of selecting certain scenes rather than others. The Bible is also a traditional book since it effects a choice in what it describes. If I were ever to film the life of Christ, I would film the scenes which are left out of the Bible. In *Senso*, which I quite like, it was the scenes which Visconti concealed that I wanted to see. Each time I wanted to know what Farley Granger said to Alida Valli – bang! – a fade out. *Pierrot le fou*, from this standpoint, is the antithesis of *Senso*: the moments you do not see in *Senso* are shown in *Pierrot*.¹

This is how, in 1965, Jean-Luc Godard explained the relationship between his *Pierrot le fou* (1965) and Luchino Visconti's *Senso* (1954) (Figs. 1 and 2). It would be hard to find a purer deployment of the sequel concept in cinema: "the moments you do not see in *Senso* are shown in *Pierrot*." Yet, clearly, this is no simple *extension* or *continuation* by Godard of the fictional world created by Visconti. Not even a contemporary Hollywood term like "re-imagining" can cover it. At stake in Godard's reflection is the relation of modern or modernist cinema – his kind of cinema – to the "great traditional cinema", and even to traditional narrative forms more generally (hence the free-associative insert on the Bible). That passage from the classical to the modern implies a break, a breach – the kind of breach which Jacques Rivette once remarked (again in reference to Roberto Rossellini) that filmmakers – maybe even film spectators – must pass "on pain of death".²

The majority of sequel-talk in current film and television scholarship is overwhelmingly holistic, seeking to reconcile originals with their offspring by appealing to concepts derived from organic, classical aesthetics. No "pain

of death” here. The most popular concept has been that of *world-making* or world-building – a profoundly novelistic concept, in that it gestures back to the nineteenth century “instalment narratives” of Dickens and Balzac or, within contemporary popular culture, to the fantasy/sci-fi book series of Ursula Le Guin, H. K. Rowling or Mervyn Peake. What this notion boils down to was once summed up by Sean Cubitt, who speculated on the appeal of the *Pirates of the Caribbean* series in the following terms: “What people follow the films for is not the story of the pirates, but the world of the Caribbean.”³ This is not a real world, of course, rather a fully imaginary, fictive one... but a world, nonetheless.

The idea that sequels – and spectators’ investments of pleasure in them – have primarily to do with coherent, mappable fictional worlds strikes me as a conservative, retrograde idea for criticism and theory. What is a film-world, after all? A vast assemblage of fragments, sensations, associations, allusions – such is the very nature of the filmic text both as an aesthetic object and a materially/industrially produced artefact – which only loosely coheres, and manages to do so only to the extent that the spectator’s sympathetic imagination is at work to seal the gaps and cement the illusion. Even at the level of a hypothetical “popular imagination” – the mundane, everyday experience of cinema for most people – I wonder how binding the illusion of a film-world really is. Like a video-game on this level, even the grandest blockbuster is a more or less transparent succession of instrumental bits and pieces (but not merely “attractions” in the commonly accepted sense), designed for one or another purpose in turn: to create an enthralling spatial or architectural phantasmagoria at one moment, to dazzle us with the associative leaps of the storytelling process at another, to show off a star performance, and so on. Even if the notion of a film-world is of some use in taking the measure of *Firefly*, the *Bourne* thrillers or the *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings* cycles, it conveniently ignores the vast and fascinating terrain of what I will call here the *modernist sequel* – a movement or tendency that takes in much of the most vital and significant work being made in world cinema today. As a loose genre, the modernist sequel begins with Godard’s mid-1960s Nouvelle Vague gesture in relation to *Senso*. The modernist sequel is, in fact, always a *gesture* in the strongest artistic sense: not the mere continuation of an original film but a pointed “taking up” of it, some manner of commentary or critique upon it.

A word is in order here about my use of the words modern and modernist in relation to cinema. The context is the account sketched in my recent book *What is Modern Cinema?*: even though film history has its avant-gardes that are fundamentally linked with art movements pre-World War II, modernism in cinema takes hold only after that War, flowering particularly in the 1960s and lasting through most of the 1970s – so, roughly, a trajectory that runs from Italian neo-realism through the French Nouvelle Vague and finally the New German Cinema.⁴ In the early 1980s a cinematic postmodernism is born, insofar as many innovative practitioners return – often deceptively – to the

“classics”, and to seemingly conventional modes of narration and representation (as is the case with Godard himself, or Wim Wenders); modernism enters an involutive phase in its search for the new. However, I firmly believe that a notion of modern cinema is worth maintaining as our guiding thread right through to present-day production – it was not simply replaced or usurped by the postmodern.

In a relatively short span of time, it seems to me, we have largely lost the best intellectual language for describing the “modernist remake” gesture in cinema. Today, as I have argued elsewhere,⁵ the general work of appropriation – sequels, remakes, homages, parodies, and so on – follows (in the way it is described) a rather pacific route, tied to fully *conscious* artistic strategies: Quentin Tarantino quotes, Steven Soderbergh pays homage, the Coen brothers mix their genres, and so on. The results are usually judged to be controlled, “masterful”, if not always tasteful – and almost always offered up as a respectful homage to one or other of the greats of cinema (Hitchcock, Lang, Ford, Hawks...). How different this is to the infamous 1977 formulation by Stephen Heath, that Nagisa Oshima’s *The Realm of the Senses* (1976) functions as a “direct and ruinous remake” of Max Ophüls’ *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948).⁶ Or the work, undertaken from the early 1960s until her recent death, by Marie-Claire Ropars, who in one of her final texts (“On Filmic Rewriting”) deconstructively conjured a “*dispositif* of destruction” in film remakes, which “create fault lines in the source texts” and proceed “by duplicitous reflection and identity-destruction.”⁷ Her chief inspiration and guide here is Marguerite Duras, maker of the aptly titled *Destroy, She Said* (1969), whose *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert* (1976) is an especially ruinous remake of/sequel to her *India Song* of the previous year, with the same soundtrack but a darkened image largely stripped of human figures and visible plot traces.

Another recent, densely elaborated example of such a line of thought is to be found in Raúl Ruiz’s book series *Poetics of Cinema*, a rich resource so far under-utilised by cinema studies. In a series of texts and interviews throughout the 1990s and into the new century, Ruiz developed his programmatic idea that “a film with 300 shots is 300 films”.⁸ Meaning, each shot secretes its own space and its own fiction, records its own document, creates its own off-screen double – and thus contains its very own world. Ruiz intends this notion to be applicable right across the board: not only to films that (in an avant-garde or modernist context) intend to disrupt classical codes but, inescapably, *all* films. Any film is thus a swarm of mutually interfering worlds – micro-worlds in parallel or, more dramatically, *impossible* worlds in conflict, to borrow a term from Leibnizian philosophy by way of Gilles Deleuze.⁹

For Ruiz, we might say – both in his theory and his practice – the essence of cinema is its fundamental discontinuity: the interval or rupture between shot-units, impossible to ever fully suture, forming another kind of “*dispositif*

of destruction” inherent to even the most professional well-made film. One recalls another 1970s idea lost in the rush to the Next Big Thing: that films are constitutively *heterogeneous* rather than *homogenous* – an idea that destabilises, in one blow, the entire “single fictional world” theory. In the second volume of *Poetics*, Ruiz even extends his notion of internal fragmentation, multiplicity and discontinuity beyond the discrete shots and into the multiple takes of each shot – all different, and all leaving their phantasmic trace on the so-called “finished work”. In his meditation on the twin notions of *vicinity* and *resonance* – particularly in relation to the swarm of films that constitute a genre – Ruiz summarises the “immobile multiplicities” that define his view of cinema:

In each version that we watch, there lives, there vegetates, another film that we won't see. And if we could see the other, then the first version would be by its side as its neighbour, though a terribly noisy neighbour. In film, more so than in other arts, *coexistence* and *co-insistence* – synonyms for vicinity and resonance – make themselves noticeable such that they determine a reflective and speculative off-screen. That is to say, when we watch a film, we haven't seen it completely. Unless someone were to miraculously order all the scenes. Yet, would that be the complete film? It's not clear, given that the script on which the film is based has also been remade and refashioned.¹⁰

Poetics of Cinema forces upon us the question: if it is impossible for any one film to achieve an internal *continuity*, and thus build its fictional world, how on earth can another film – its sequel – ever be expected to achieve its global *continuation*? It is from this premise of impossibility and inevitable discrepancy that modernist sequels begin.

There is a Utopian dimension to Ruiz's reflections (and perhaps my own, as well) – after all, as he ruefully points out, in practice the constraining forces of coherence and homogeneity do indeed, too often, slip in to overpower the free play of the cinematic possible/virtual, this fragmenting “true nature” of cinema. But let us take inspiration from his example and, at the very least, try to put the holistic notion of the fictional world that supposedly exists across linked films under strain, by paying preliminary attention to some striking limit-cases – works largely in the classical canon, but at its less policed, more unruly edges (B cinema or independent production), tending towards the breaking-points that constitute outright or explicit modernism.

Under the Volcano

To begin with respectable, almost canonical examples: the *Mad Max* and *Dr. Mabuse* series – both of which, hypothetically, are still open for future instalments! Although fans of the former series often seem to be in a state of denial about its zany heterogeneity – another kind of sympathetic spectator suturing – the fact remains up there on screen that director George Miller

embraced a novel way of constructing sequels: by immediate erasure, unspoken withdrawal and systematic rewriting of each previous instalment's fictive premise and generated world.¹¹ The evidence for this claim is irrefutable: *Mad Max* (1979) does not portray the post-apocalyptic world that is retroactively introduced at the beginning of *Mad Max 2*, also known as *The Road Warrior* (1982); and nothing of the truly Baroque social order of Bartertown in *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* (1985) has any real equivalence in the punk-tribalist free-for-all of *Mad Max 2*. The only substantial connecting thread is Max himself; and his heroic function shifts radically – and without a clear “psychological arc” – from one instalment to the next: from aggrieved revenge seeker to reluctant helper to a Christ-like saviour (and probably to crusty Hawksian father-figure if the long-prepared *Mad Max 4* is ever made). In all this, Miller may well have been taking a leaf from Fritz Lang: the latter's *Mabuse* films (themselves only a part of the total cinematic and literary *Mabuse* corpus) invent ingenious ways of continuing the central figure in variously disseminated, even disintegrated forms: from remote control hero behind a bank of technology (in *Dr. Mabuse: The Gambler*, 1922) to a ghost-mind that possesses others (in *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse*, 1932), and finally to an elusive, phantom figure, almost a figment of the collective mind of modernity. A blip within mass media circuits of radio, film and television (in *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse*, 1960) – Mabuse becomes progressively emptied out, de-individuated, abstracted, finally assimilable to the menacing, authoritarian cinematic apparatus which Lang himself wields so well...¹²

Two American independent productions that brought early fame to Brian De Palma – *Greetings* (1968) and *Hi, Mom!* (1970) – pose another kind of challenge to classification. *Hi, Mom!* takes over – to the point of duplicating, only more elaborately, many elements of its predecessor (De Niro as a “peep artist”, the anti-war counter-culture, a dating service); but it is quite impossible to determine whether it is a loose remake, or (as Jean-Pierre Coursodon and Bertrand Tavernier put it in their *50 ans de cinéma américain*) “a sequel to *Greetings*, in which the same character who sold De Niro a porno film now hires him to make one,”¹³ thus extending and continuing scenaric elements from the original. Its cheeky working title was, indeed, a testament to such categorical confusion: *Son of Greetings*. Because, in terms of the movie industry, the “son” of a film could be either a cynical attempt to simply make the same thing and score the same success again (son as father's double or stand-in, “chip off the old block”), or an artistic attempt to renew and improve an initial inspiration (son as re-embodiment, perpetuation and re-invention of father's legacy – which is probably exactly how De Palma sees his cinematic filiation apropos Hitchcock).

B movies are always crucial to consult when we are patrolling what (happily) escapes the border between the classical and the modern in cinema. We can

find many examples of what we might call *strained* sequels in this realm. *Dollman vs. The Demonic Toys* (1993) for instance, is a work that literally picks apart and builds upon previous films directed and/or produced by its poverty-row auteur, Charles Band. This film redefined the direct-to-video “quickie” form that had developed through the 1980s (when Band scored his biggest success with *Future Cop*, 1985, whose familiarly iconic star Tim Thomerson returns here) and 1990s. Much of a very short (57 minute) feature – loosely wound around a plot concerning Thomerson as the miniature Dollman and Tracy Scoggins as his life-size cop buddy – is taken up with clips from three previous, completely unrelated Band productions: *Dollman* (1991), *Demonic Toys* (1991) and *Bad Channels* (1992). Between these crazy, rapid-fire digests of various plots and fictional worlds, the film contrives a mind-boggling way to bring together a disparate array of science fiction, soft porn, comedy and horror elements. If these fragments form some sort of whole, it is a decidedly monstrous beast.

In 1999, American director Steven Soderbergh (with his inventive screenwriter Lem Dobbs) proposed a curious structure at the heart of his *The Limey*: the character of Wilson, a criminal played by Terence Stamp, has been borrowed from a previous film made 32 years earlier, Ken Loach’s *Poor Cow* (1967) – a borrowing signalled by the frequent insertion of comparative shots from the original work. This is, at the outset, a surreal leap: the two films are in no sense whatsoever co-extensive, since they do not share a similar genre, plot or mood (and in the original the character even has a different name). Soderbergh’s main focus, of course, is on his now-iconic star – and, specifically, Stamp’s youthful looks of 1967 as caught in the rough, grainy black-and-white cinematography of Loach’s original. These shots become an essential element of the new film’s jazzy montage (freer in its associations than the contemporary Hollywood norm usually allows). I shall return to the radical implications of such a fully *corporeal* gesture in the truly modernist sequels to be considered next; for the moment, it should be noted that Soderbergh’s idea has caught on as a stylish novelty. A 2007 episode of the American series *Boston Legal*, for example, contrived a plot line centring on William Shatner’s character of Denny Crane by using footage from a 1957 live TV drama, *The Defenders*, in which Shatner (playing a different character) once starred, also in a legal-eagle role. In an echo of the De Palma case, the *Boston Legal* story is titled *Son of the Defender* – and is indeed about a crisis in a father-son relationship! Intriguingly, Ruiz himself has imagined a conceit of this type: a project cooked up with Martin Landau, in which the actor would reprise his role as Béla Lugosi from Tim Burton’s *Ed Wood* (1994) within a strange Eastern European tale of bureaucracy and vampirism.¹⁴

Lastly, in this inventory of stopovers on the road to the full-blown modernist sequel, we can mention the intriguing case of documentary sequels. What could be more perfectly coherent, more inherently seamless than a

documentary project that picks up its real subjects at a later point in their lives? The ongoing documentary cycle – of the kind best known and most analysed in Michael Apted's *7 Up Series* (1964-) – would seem to be the prototypical form of cinematic realism as extolled and theorised by André Bazin in the 1940s: here, surely, we can rightly speak of the continuation or extension of a world, since it is our, actual world.

But there are disquieting instances of documentary which insist less on continuity or evolution than discrepancy, entropy, a sense of time lost or frozen rather than evolving. One such example is opened by Georges Rouquier's *Farrebique, or The Four Seasons* (1946), an account of rural life, mixing documentary and fictional elements, which earned Bazin's praise as a singular expression of cinematic neo-realism.¹⁵ Thirty-seven years later, *Biquefarre* (1983) again garnered accolades from the *Cahiers du cinéma* set – but in an entirely different intellectual and cultural context, specifically the context in which *Cahiers'* then-editor, Serge Daney, called for films to divide, rather than unite, both themselves and their spectators: "What matters to us today is that every image implies a point of view, that every point of view divides, and that all division is productive."¹⁶ *Biquefarre* – once again, a case of visiting the place and participants of the original – announces in its boldly switched-around title its "bifurcation", rather than simple continuation, of the classic *Farrebique*. Industrialisation has taken its toll on the environment and its inhabitants; Rouquier's fiction cannot easily be "taken up" again – the changing reality resists it, and the film is an account of this very difficulty in "stitching" up time, narrative and experience.

Let us note a recurring, crucial detail in many of these instances of sequelisation: the interplay of black-and-white (old footage) and colour (contemporary footage). The smooth transition from black-and-white to colour is, by now, an almost hoary convention in documentary and fiction modes alike: it signals a leap in time from "days gone by" to the present, even if the old footage has to be mocked up as scratched, greying "silent movie" footage, complete with the (rather Ruizian!) off-screen noise of a humming projector. This kind of "passage" from one kind of filmic material to another has become so conventionalised precisely in order to "suture" the potential rupture of difference between one class of shots – and materially, one kind of celluloid stock – and another. But it is impossible to entirely suppress or repress the evident play of these heterogeneous textures if one is skipping back and forth between them – a heterogeneity that is particularly evident (and only slightly smoothed out) in the Soderbergh example, with its enjoyment of jazzy, busily textured and patterned montage forms. But in its starker form – the comparison of times and places in the documentary of Rouquier, the difference between colour and black-and-white, the shock of the leap between them from one film to the other – these different film stocks and chromatisms come to stand for utterly different filmic worlds.

From the Other Side

My aim in this final section is not to offer an exhaustive analysis of the work of the modernist sequel, but to survey a field that has, to date, received little sustained or even preliminary attention. For starters, let us quickly survey the kind of possibilities that are currently being explored by progressive filmmakers. In *Sad Vacation* (2007), Shinji Aoyama imagines a plot that brings together two characters from two of his previous films, *Helpless* (1997) and *Eureka* (2001) – characters who existed in diegeses with no previous connection or overlap. Hal Hartley's *Fay Grim* (2007) poses itself as a sequel to his *Henry Fool* (1998) – but completely switches both tone and genre. In *2046* (2004), Wong Kar-wai takes up the decidedly surreal story/trajectory of Mo-wan (Tony Leung) who remains “fixed” in his depiction in the 1960s – even though in recent cinema history he has appeared not only four years previously in *In the Mood for Love* (2000), but a full decade again before that in the enigmatic ending (another surprise “fold” that seems to kick off an entirely different story) of *Days of Being Wild* (1990). Thus we are presented with a figure who visibly ages, in reality (Leung as an actor), from film to film while his character remains stuck in time: a striking cinematic paradox of the kind that Wong loves to cultivate, and a superb response to the fragile illusion entertained by Mo-wan that things “will never change”.¹⁷ And lest we forget, a curious and little-remarked-on precursor to this: the young Jerzy Skolimowski casting himself as the fictional (but semi-autobiographical) character Andrzej in twin films made one year apart, *Identification Marks: None* (1964) and *Walkover* (1965) – yet with a leap of six years in their diegetic chronology, thus evoking the filmmaker's dream of what he may become in the near future... As Michael Walker once rightly remarked: “It is a little difficult to unite the histories” of these two films.¹⁸ Precisely! Skolimowski would in fact go on to make two further films featuring this Andrzej – but, third time around, played by a different actor to further diversify the game.

A more in-depth, focused discussion of the issue can begin with an example that is recent but already justly canonical: in 2006, the great Portuguese director Manoel de Oliveira created a 68-minute sequel to the 1967 classic *Belle de jour* (“Beauty by Day”), logically enough titled *Belle toujours* (“Beauty Forever”), explicitly offered as a homage to the director and writer of the original, respectively Luis Buñuel and Jean-Claude Carrière (Figs. 3 and 4). De Oliveira hoped, at first, to cast the stars of the original, Catherine Deneuve and Michel Piccoli (who had both worked for him on several previous occasions); ultimately, he settled for Piccoli (reprising his role as Henri Husson) and another icon of 1960s (and beyond) French cinema, Bulle Ogier, who brings an undeniable screwball charm to the role of Séverine.

Belle toujours is nothing if not a *commentary* upon Buñuel's film. Although there is certainly an affinity between the artistic styles of Buñuel's and de Oliveira's careers (which overlap from the early 1930s to the late 1970s) – a penchant for droll understatement, a slyly unadorned mode of representation, digressions

Fig. 3
Belle de jour 1967
Film still
Dir. Luis Buñuel
Robert et Raymond Hakim



Fig. 4
Belle toujours 2006
Film still
Dir. Manoel de Oliveira
Filbox Produções



and dream-apparitions – there is in fact very little superficially in common (beyond Piccoli, some locations and motifs) between *Belle de jour* and *Belle toujours* in either content or form. De Oliveira’s superbly constructed “miniature” is, in fact, far more like any one of his own previous films: it is comprised largely of a series of hieratic dialogues (especially between Piccoli and a worldly-wise bartender) and recital-performances (in this case, musical), strictly punctuated by day and night wide-shot views of Paris. Its themes, too, are pure de Oliveira: the strange destiny of women who oscillate between illicit sexuality and spiritual renunciation of the world; the tenuous fragility of daily reality; the quietly comic role of men as masters of nothing.

So how and where to locate what Heath rightly called (in relation to *Letter from an Unknown Woman* and *The Realm of the Senses*) the “points of ruinous remake” – without which the modernist sequel, as a cinematic mode, cannot even begin to exist?¹⁹ *Belle toujours* is a *textual* remake (in the sense that Ropars’ work offers a theory of cinematic and literary *textuality*) because it takes up the central, unanswered plot question of the original, its gnawing mystery, the deliberate hole in its narrational fabric: what did Husson say to Séverine’s husband (played by Jean Sorel) that produced (as it seems) the tears on his cheek? Did Husson reveal Séverine’s secret life of prostitution? This event, in the original, is outside of Séverine’s experience, her point-of-view, and is hence absent from the story and the film: only its ambiguous consequences are seen. The daring, modernist element in de Oliveira’s gesture of sequelisation is, precisely, to once again leave this question unanswered – to exacerbate the secret and enhance its corrosive mystery. We know less about the characters and the inner logic of their story at the end of *Belle toujours* than we did at the end of *Belle de jour*! There is no imaginable Hollywood sequel that could ever function on this principle of radical withholding.

The work of the highly cinephilic post-Nouvelle Vague director Claire Denis takes the principle of textual *filiation* or *transmission* – the passing (often subterranean or unconscious in nature) of material from one text into another – and extends it into highly inventive forms of sequel-making. Like de Oliveira, she performs the gesture of taking an iconic actor and a particular role he played of intense historic significance – Michel Subor as Bruno Forestier in Godard’s *Le Petit Soldat* (1960) – and places him within the very different fictional context of the haunting Foreign Legion tale *Beau Travail* (1999). In interviews, Denis mused on the process of plucking out this figure and imagining what could have become of him 40 years later; but, once again, there is no necessary or determining link between the plots of the two films. Denis keeps a steady, dual focus: on Bruno, an imaginary character, this “man who got away” – who even performs some of the same enigmatic gestures (such as passing his hands before his face, alone, in front of a mirror) as he did in Godard’s film – and on the *emblematic figure* who has come to stand for a certain aspect of 1960s culture greedily appropriated by the imaginary of its spectators over several genera-

tions. Subor as a presence thus serves, all at once, as a real man, a fictional character, and a *sign* of something beyond himself.

Casting, even in relatively conventional films, often works in emblematic ways. Think, for example, of Marlon Brando and Jean-Pierre Léaud in Bernardo Bertolucci's *Last Tango in Paris* (1973), each embodying and carrying the associations of a certain cinematic legacy, Hollywood and Nouvelle Vague respectively. But Denis, by inventing the Bruno Forestier conceit, takes this game to a new level. She was to go further still in a subsequent film, *L'Intrus* (2004), re-using Subor, but this time in relation to footage from an *unfinished* film (*Le Reflux*) by Paul Gégauff (a legendary, controversial behind-the-scenes figure and prolific screenwriter of the Nouvelle Vague) dating from 1965. It is from this exotic Tahitian footage that Denis weaves (*Limey*-style) the transnational backstory of Subor's character, while again conjuring a commentary upon the experience of the 1960s and a specific history of cinematic representations.

Godard has himself explicitly revisited his past work in the same manner that Denis used it. Of course, virtually every Godard piece, more comprehensively than those of Denis, is woven from references to past cinema, and frequently his own past efforts: Peter Wollen calls *Nouvelle Vague* (1990), for instance, a "reworking of his own origins as a classic reference text", and thus a moment in his own postmodern involution.²⁰ One of Godard's least-known (because made for television) major works of the 1990s, *Germany 90 neuf zéro* (1991), makes use of a very craggy Eddie Constantine (aged 77 at the time of filming) in the same role that he made famous in *Alphaville* (1965): the futuristic but nostalgically hardboiled Pop Art private eye Lemmy Caution. Again, there is no connection in genre, plot or mood between the two films – the more significant filiation being, as the title signposts, Rossellini's *Germany, Year Zero* (1947). But Godard seizes the very motor of *Alphaville* – the humour and critique generated by the anachronistic presence of Constantine/Caution in a techno-totalitarian world – and doubles its force of displacement: like much of Godard's later work, *Germany 90* is a melancholic poem built upon stasis, entropy, the non-alignment of its elements. Godard's report on the state of things in Germany today proceeds – unlike the Rossellini – via an element that, on so many levels, does not "belong" there.

The Portuguese director Pedro Costa has devoted the greater part of his career so far to an unusual kind of film series. Basing himself in Fonthainas, a slum section of Lisbon, he has tracked the lives of a group of its inhabitants – not in a documentary fashion, but by meticulously constructing fictions that mirror certain aspects of these people's turbulent existences. *Ossos* (*Bones*, 1997), the first of this series, is a self-contained story in the usual manner. However, beginning with *In Vanda's Room* (2000) – which also inaugurates Costa's move into digital cinematography that he himself operates – every one of his films (with the exception of the commissioned documentary *Where Lies Your Hidden Smile?*, 2001)

Fig. 5
Colossal Youth 2006
Film still
Dir. Pedro Costa
Ventura Film



dwells within this small world and focuses on its key participants. But, even as these figures reappear at different moments of their lives, motifs circulate, the urban location evolves and Costa's minimalist cinematic style intensifies and deepens,²¹ there is nonetheless an unsettling discontinuity between *In Vanda's Room*, the subsequent epic feature made six years later, *Colossal Youth* (2006) (Fig. 5), and two further shorts, *Tarrafal* (2007) and *The Rabbit Hunters* (2007). The now famous "starring" figures of Vanda and Ventura, almost defiantly "natural" and non-actorly, are always, in some sense, "themselves", for they could hardly be anything else more "illusionistic". We follow, from story to story, what appears to be the actual, social relocation of the characters from year to year and place to place – and yet each piece begins anew, in a *tabula rasa* gesture (unmistakeably displacing itself from the previous "entry" in the series) that is headily reminiscent of the *Mad Max* cycle. This evokes a new premise, a new *dream* of these people and their world (this subtle but powerfully pervasive oneiric quality is cued by extensive reference to the Surrealist poetry of Robert Desnos, already a reference point in such earlier Costa films as *Casa de lava*, 1994).

Much has been made in this concluding section of the re-casting of actors in roles they had previously played. There are popular examples of this phenomenon that are striking and noteworthy in themselves for various reasons: the story of the lovers played by Julie Delpy and Ethan Hawke in Richard Linklater's *Before Sunrise* (1995) continued nine years later in *Before Sunset* (2004); or Richard Lester's curiosity *Return of the Musketeers* (1989), which successfully managed to reassemble the cast of his earlier *The Three Musketeers* (1973) and *The Four Musketeers* (1974), on the premise of being an adaptation of Alexandre Dumas' similarly chronological novelistic coda *Twenty Years After!* But these are, in the terms I am proposing here, ultimately conventional examples: the characters and their milieux may change and evolve, but within entirely classical limits.

The consciously modernist sequels I am studying, however, go much further into the meditation opened by the idea (first made famous by Rossellini and, after him, the Nouvelle Vague) that "all films are documentaries on their actors" – that is, before and beyond being anything else, such as fictions, illusory worlds, and so on. This points up something peculiar to cinema which is utterly foreign to literature, and fudged (via numerous stagecraft and genre conventions) in the performing arts (theatre, circus and, especially, opera): to bring an actor back in any kind of sequel, classical or modernist, is to put him or her before the merciless lens (and audience) and to testify, inevitably, to the passing of time and its consequences – such as the growing recognition of mortality and everything that spells for human affairs (personal or political). Yet the most radical modernist sequels are not simply interrogations of the inescapability of growing old – as de Oliveira's films prove, more intensely with each new year, they also seek to explode the very idea of *identity* or selfhood in all its forms and ramifications (as does Denis' work: witness Subor's depersonalising trajectory in

L'Intrus, for instance, his character's body cut open to accommodate a new heart). We return here, in a new light, to Ropars' concept of *identity-destruction* in the modernist sequel. In the breaking up and multiplication of a person or persona under the seeming or assumed unity of a sequel, these films enter into the spirit described so well by Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben: "A birthday cannot be the commemoration of a past day but, like every true celebration, must be an abolition of time – the epiphany and presence of Genius."²²

Let us glimpse, finally, into the rich area of contemporary avant-garde cinema – where, in the past decade or so, there have been intriguing experiments in the kind of "frame by frame remake" which commentators (somewhat mistakenly) saw at work in Gus Van Sant's *Psycho* (1998).²³ More profoundly in the avant-garde than in any other cinematic genre or mode, the line between remake and sequel is devastatingly blurred – precisely because the gap or discrepancy (in time, sensibility, culture, politics...) between an original work and its contemporary "correspondence" is emphasised and exaggerated, rather than downplayed or sutured out of existence. It is precisely this interval – and the inevitable difference it creates – which allows the possibility of a critique, a point of view, even when the new texts are rendered as identical as possible to their sources.

My chosen case study in this realm is James Benning's masterpiece *27 Years Later* (2005), usually screened straight after his *One Way Boogie Woogie* (1977) which it "answers". The original is devoted to a large number of mundane social sites in Wisconsin (factories, shops, streets...); Benning at the time was exploring a "hard edge" pictorialism (in colour scheme, frontal framing, etc), interrogating narrative (via isolated gestures, hinted-at events, extensive use of visual and aural incidents coming in and out of the static frames), and discovering unusual formal parameters or patterns to provide successive different entry-points for the spectator into the work (such as the punning relation of the "one way" signs to the framing strategies). A quarter of a century later, Benning became aware that the world he had filmed was on the verge of disappearing altogether under the force of creeping industrialisation and globalisation, so he set out to place his camera in almost exactly the same spots as he had in *One Way Boogie Woogie*. Faced with the material difficulty of "re-recording" what in many cases is no longer there, in a landscape frequently transformed beyond his recognition, the entire project undergoes a massive material and conceptual displacement: the "same" film (in some sense), but with completely different concerns. The pictorialism, the games with narrative, are largely gone; suddenly *27 Years Later* is – in its active memory-relation to the first film – a disturbing, minimalist, political documentary on social change over the passage of time. What register as outright gags or purely formalist experiments in the original – twin sisters performing choreographed gestures, a woman leaving a factory (in an evocation of early cinema newsreels), three-colour separation giving a ghostly effect to passing cars, the shapes of belching factory chimneys – become (especially when the same people perform roughly the same gestures) markers of a bleak social critique.

This sequelising displacement is helped by Benning's ingenious recourse to the same technique Duras had used in *Son nom de Venise dans Calcutta désert*, but here mobilised to entirely different ends: he preserves the soundtrack of *One Way Boogie Woogie* (itself cleverly stage-managed as a succession of direct-sound "events") in its entirety and uses it to strictly determine the length of each new shot, which arrives in exactly the same sequence as the original. When I asked Benning (at the 2007 Ljubljana Film Festival) whether he has considered showing the two films literally side-by-side, he replied that an installation set-up would be preferable for his analytic purposes: each film projected at opposite ends of a room or corridor, but with a necessary *interval* (the second film began one or two shots after the first) to prompt the troubled memory-work of the spectator.

Postscript: Kingdom of the Crystal Skulls

Why has there been so little work done thus far, within scholarly film analysis, on the modernist sequel? One of my principal objections to much of what is written about cinematic sequels today is political: like so much (far too much) film scholarship, it thoughtlessly bows to the mainstream industry, to Spielberg, Soderbergh and *Star Wars*, and allows Hollywood (understood in its broadest, transnational sense) to set the agenda of how we are to conceptualise and explore issues – usually with a lazy populist rider attached (or implied) that, since the majority of filmgoing people see the mainstream product, it is what we naturally should spend our time with.

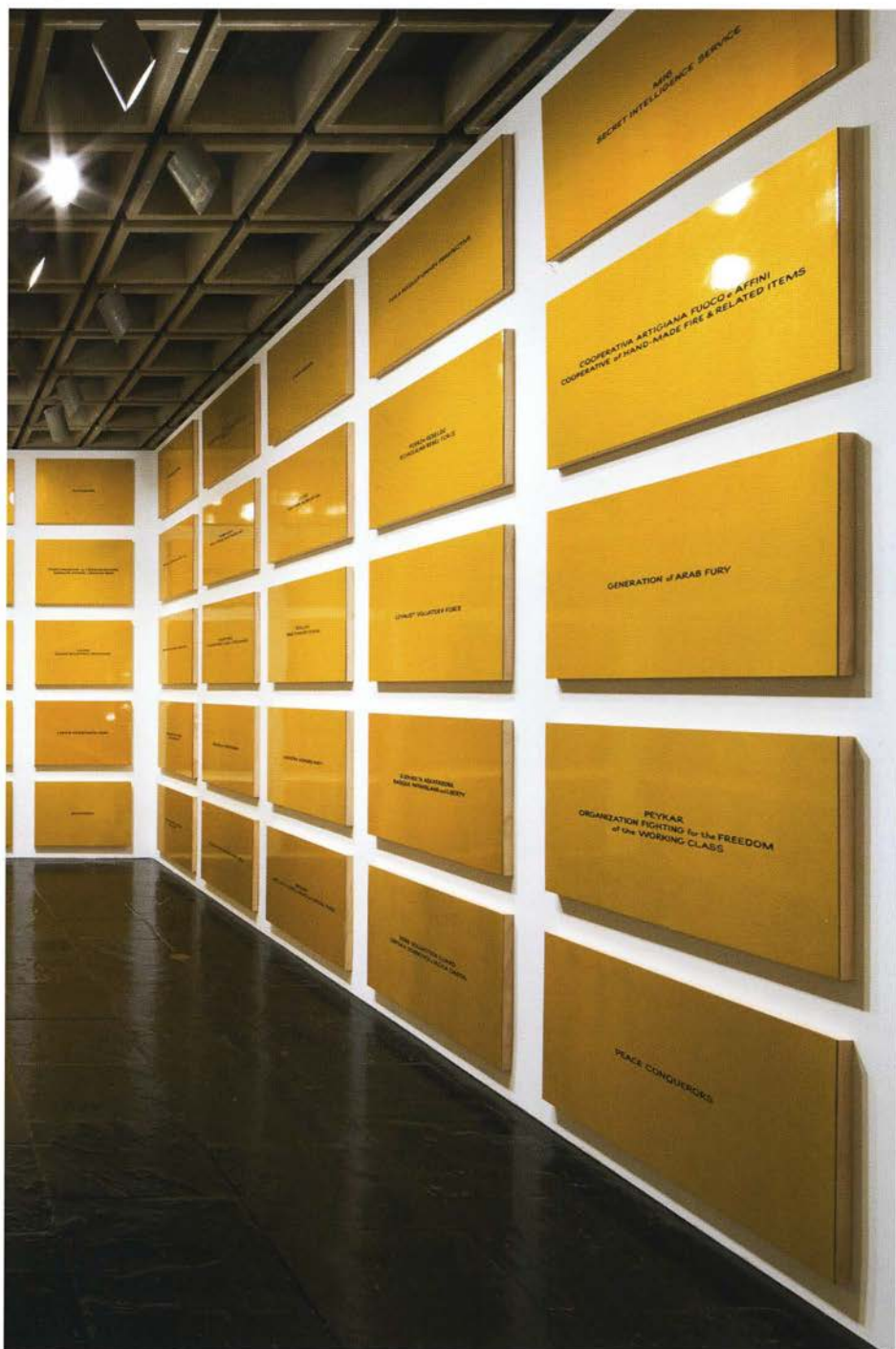
Along with this attitude comes – as I have tried to suggest here – a largely unquestioned capitulation to lowest common denominator ideas of what the cinema is as a medium for telling stories, depicting characters, building worlds, etc. It is a recipe for crippling conservatism, in thought as in art or culture.

I have no objection to reading (or even writing) yet another article on *The Matrix* and its sequels – global culture is surely big enough to accommodate that. But critics and scholars need *en masse* to realise that there is political purpose as well as artistic-intellectual adventurousness at stake in seeking out and discussing *Colossal Youth* or *27 Years Later* as exemplars of what a film sequel can be today, rather than *Ocean's 13* (2007) or *Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull* (2008). Without such adventurous moves we sell cinema, in its true depth and diversity, very short indeed.

1. Tom Milne ed., *Godard on Godard* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972), 222. The original French interview comes from *Cahiers du cinéma*, October, 1965, 171.
2. Jacques Rivette, "Letter on Rossellini," trans. Tom Milne, in *Rivette: Texts and Interviews*, ed. Jonathan Rosenbaum (London: British Film Institute, 1977), 54.
3. Sean Cubitt, personal correspondence, October, 2007.
4. Adrian Martin *¿Qué es el cine moderno?* (Santiago: Uqbar, 2008), 15–27.
5. Adrian Martin "Film Remakes," *Velvet Light Trap* 61 (2008): 60–62.
6. Stephen Heath, "The Question Oshima," *Wide Angle* 2, no. 1 (1977): 49. Note that the prevalent misnaming of Oshima's film as *In the Realm of the Senses* stems from a misreading of the main on-screen credits, which lists (in French) the actors and then "dans" (in) before the title.
7. Marie-Claire Ropars, "On Filmic Rewriting: Contamination of the Arts or Destruction of Art's Identity?," trans. Malcolm Phillips, *Rouge* 11 (2007). http://www.rouge.com.au/11/filmic_rewriting.html.
8. H. Bandis, A. Martin and G. McDonald eds., *Raúl Ruiz: Images of Passage* (Rouge Press: Rotterdam Film Festival, 2004).
9. See Gilles Deleuze's seminars on Leibniz transcribed at <http://www.webdeleuze.com>.
10. Raúl Ruiz, *Poetics of Cinema 2* (Paris: Dis Voir, 2007), 64.
11. For further elaboration, see Adrian Martin, *The Mad Max Movies* (Sydney: ScreenSound/Currency Press, 2003).
12. See Nicole Brenez, "Symptôme, exhibition, angoisse. Représentation de la terreur dans l'œuvre allemande de Fritz Lang (1919–1933/1959–1960)" ["Symptom, Terror, Anguish: The Representation of Terror in the German Work of Fritz Lang"], in *De la figure en général et du corps en particulier. L'invention figurative au cinéma* (Bruxelles: De Boeck, 1998), 119–132.
13. Jean-Pierre Coursodon and Bertrand Tavernier, *50 ans de cinéma américain* (Paris: Nathan, 1995), 418 (my translation).
14. See Raúl Ruiz, *Poetics of Cinema* (Paris: Dis Voir, 1995).
15. See André Bazin, *Bazin at Work: Major Essays and Review from the Forties and Fifties* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 103–108.
16. Serge Daney, "Le Cinéphilie à la voix forte (*Annie Hall*)," *Cahiers du cinéma* 282 (November 1977): 39 (my translation).
17. For a fuller discussion, see my "Point of No Return: Wong Kar-wai's *2046*," *Heat* 11 (May 2006), 49–60.
18. Michael Walker, "Jerzy Skolimowski," in *Second Wave*, ed. Ian Cameron (London: Studio Vista, 1970), 39.
19. Heath, "The Question Oshima," 53–54.
20. Peter Wollen, "L'Eternel Retour," in *Jean Luc-Godard: Son + Image*, ed. Raymond Bellour and Mary Lea Bandy (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 194.
21. See my essay on Costa's work as a whole, "The Inner Life of a Film," forthcoming in *Pedro Costa*, ed. Ricardo Matos Cabo (Lisbon: Contracosta Productions, 2009).
22. Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 12.
23. See Constantine Verevis, *Film Remakes* (Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

Col. pl. 1
Jane Alexander
Security/Segurança
(detail) 2006
Components: double
diamond mesh fence;
razor wire; steel; Brazilian
earth; germinating/
growing/dying wheat;
1000 machetes; 1000
sickles; 1000 used South
African worker's gloves
Outer fence 12 x 6 metres,
inner fence 10 x 4 metres
Guards: Fabio Silva, André
Luiz Marianno, Flávio de
Jesus Bastos, Joeferson
Goss Oliveira, Alessandro
Messias da Rocha
Photo: Juan Guerra

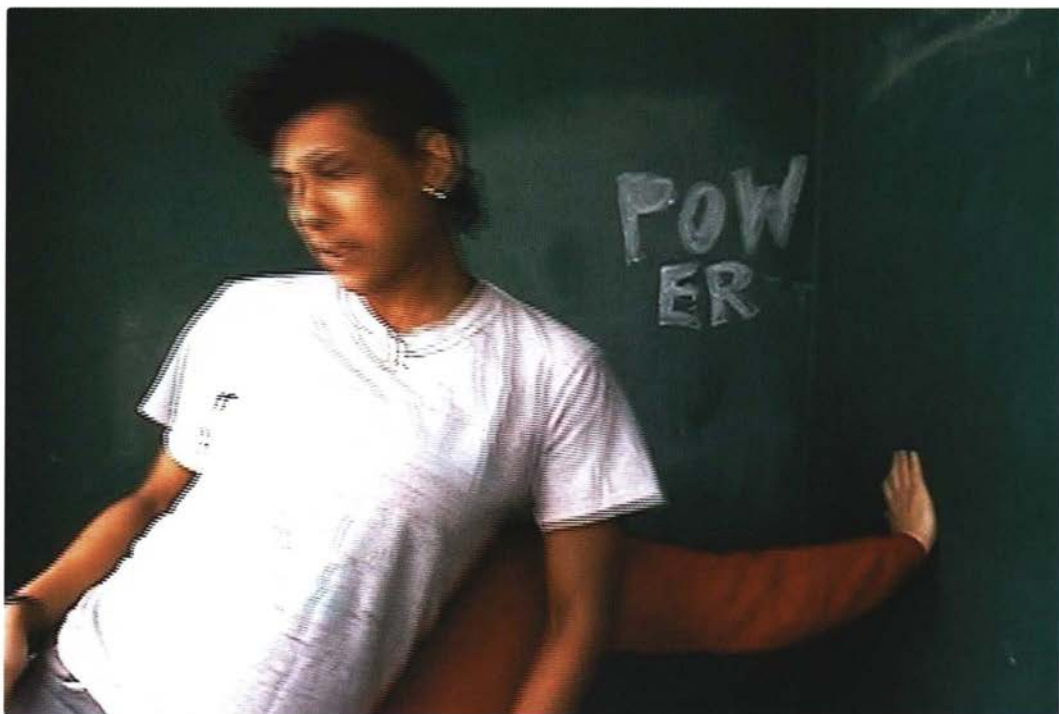




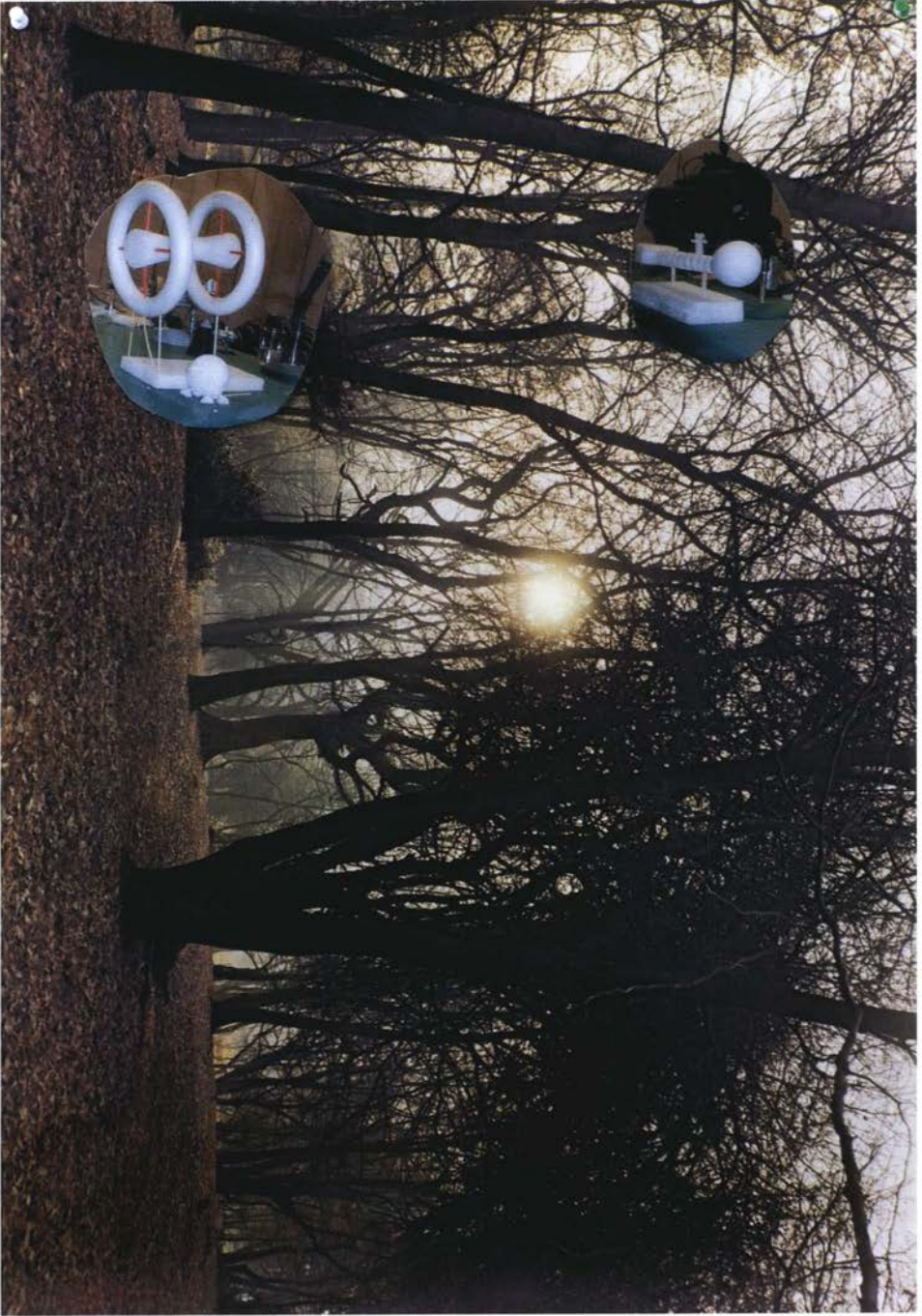
Col. pl. 2
 Daniel Joseph Martinez
Divine Violence 2008
 Installation view, The
 Whitney Biennial 2008,
 Whitney Museum.
 Black, hand lettered text,
 Gold Automotive paint
 on 92 wood panels,
 24 x 36 in. each, overall
 dimensions variable.
 Photograph courtesy
 of the Artist and The
 Project, New York
 Collection of the Whitney
 Museum of American Art
 Photo: Sheldon C. Collins

Col. pl. 3
Luis Jacob
*A Dance for Those of
Us Whose Hearts Have
Turned to Ice, Based on the
Choreography of Françoise
Sullivan and the Sculpture
of Barbara Hepworth
(With Sign-Language
Supplement)* 2007
Video (DVD), colour, silent,
08'35 mins. Three-channel
video installation with
free-standing wall, HD
video projection, television
monitors, and area rug;
reading area with 16-page
brochure, teak-root chairs,
mirror-polish chrome table,
and handwoven basket
Overall installation
dimensions:
426 x 365 x 240 cm
Courtesy of Birch Libralato,
Toronto





Col. pl. 4
Emily Roysdon
POW 2005
Video still
Courtesy the artist





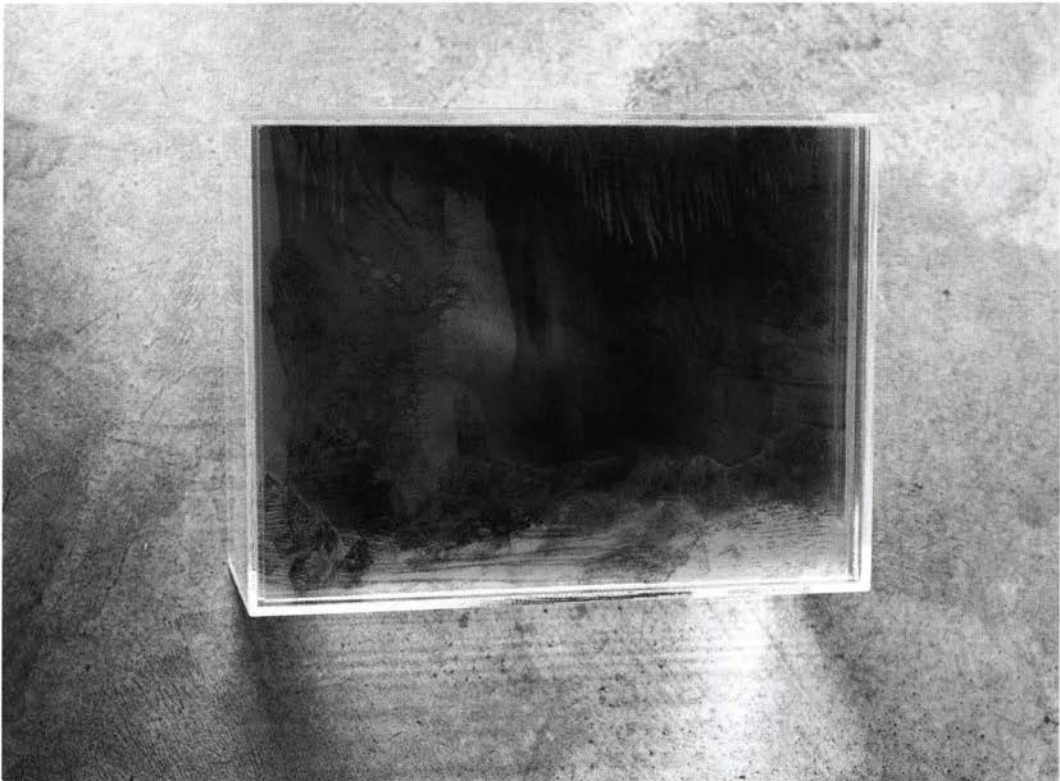
LEFT
Col. pl. 5
Dan Arps
*Fractal Tears
(Dawn)*
2008
Michael Lett,
Auckland

ABOVE
Col. pl. 6
Dan Arps
*Fractal Tears
(Therapy Object)*
2008
Michael Lett,
Auckland

Fig. 1
Donna Ong
*In the Deep, Not All
Who Wander Are Lost*
(9 Unique, One Edition)
2008
16.8 x 22 x (9-12) cm
Cut out photo-etching
printed on Mitsu medium
placed between acrylic
sheets
Made with the assistance
of Singapore Tyler Print
Institute

Leonardo da Vinci once recommended looking at stains on the walls as a device for arousing the mind and stimulating the imagination. In each stain lies the seeds for every possible space and form – landscapes emerge and fade away; mountains, rivers, rocks, trees, plains, impossible wide valleys...
In the Deep, Not All Who Wander Are Lost comprises 10 sculptural print works on Japanese paper and acrylic; these works improvise upon found photographs of underground caves. Each crevice, nook and overhang becomes a starting point

from which one may discover an infinite number of things, which can then be reduced to separate and discernible forms. Nooks that on the original photograph pushed back into the walls of the cave, turn into rocks, overhangs or protrusions. The two dimensional prints through the process of looking, duplication, cutting and layering between acrylic sheets, become transformed into entirely new three dimensional spaces through the process – an entire fantastical world formed through the flight of the imagination.



The Long Arrival

an interview with Donna Ong

Lee Weng Choy

The Rolling Stones were right: you can't always get what you want. Psychoanalysis tells us that our desire is never truly for any *object* of desire, but to perpetuate the act of desiring itself. If this is the case for everyone, everywhere in the modern world, nonetheless, there are grounds for arguing that in Singapore we have it particularly bad – we long for an arrival that will never come, but we do so in a way that is “uniquely Singapore”, as the Tourism Board's slogan would have us exclaim. Although perhaps I should have written “we” and “Singapore” in quotation marks – for rather than talking about the real thing, I'm making reference to a constitutive fantasy that those of us who live and work in this island city-state subscribe to by default. I've written many times¹ how Singapore is like modernity's idealised *tabula rasa*, the society of the spectacle *par excellence*. In Singapore, time is like nowhere else that I know; whenever I visit another city, I experience multiple times – decades, even centuries. I visit neighbourhoods that seem as characterised by continuity as by change. But here, there seems to be only one time, the present, a hurried one, on the verge of tomorrow, though not quite tomorrow. Old buildings wear worried faces, from being under siege, waiting to be knocked down, or worse, “renovated”. Sanjay Krishnan has written how

scaffolding seems the only unchanging feature in a city that sees itself in permanent transition... [it] is at once a symbol of the ugliness and the breathtaking energy of the desire for renewal or 'speed,' the desire to change rapidly and without remorse.²

Life may be more hectic in Hong Kong, Tokyo, London or New York, but I don't know of any other place where it feels like everyone marches in the same step. The pace, while by no means the fastest on the planet, is possibly the most persistent. This relentless “present” is of course not entirely omnipresent;

if it were, then this truly would be utopia. But it conjures the dream of a city predicated entirely on economic progress, where past, future, all time, is only one time, the present time – not the time of “now”, but the time of the “new”.

The Singaporean ideal is to be hub central, totally plugged in and interconnected; in other words, Singapore strives to be among the most globalised cities in the world. And, sure enough, in 2001, the US-based *Foreign Policy* journal ranked it “tops in globalisation”, as the local newspaper *The Straits Times* headlined, with unmistakable glee (January 10, 2001). Living here, I suppose one gets used to reading official pronouncements without doing a double-take to verify that they are, in fact, not being ironic. This is the island of impossible sincerity. The national aspiration to become a “global city of the arts”³ may be cringe-worthy, yet as artists and art writers, do we really think we can avoid being interpellated by the very gaze we presume to sneer at?

Which brings me to the work of Donna Ong (b. 1978). Donna works mainly as an installation artist, and is best known for her environments made from found objects, furniture and her own original art works. She studied architecture and fine art in London and had her first solo exhibition, *Palace of Dreams*, at The Arts House, Singapore, in 2004. She has exhibited widely, both locally and overseas, and participated in a number of major international exhibitions. (Some of the images of Donna’s works which accompany this interview have extended captions by the artist which discuss specific works in more detail.)

Weng Choy. One could use the word “emerging” to describe Jason Wee’s Grey Projects art space where you recently exhibited; but when it comes to individual artists, it’s a term that seems less useful as a descriptor, because it has become an overused label, an empty buzzword. But if one were to nominate a poster girl for “young, up-and-coming artist from Singapore”, you’d certainly be on the short-list. Donna, you’ve been especially productive of late. Tell us more about what you’ve been up to the last six to eight months, to give a sense of your hectic schedule and activity.

Donna. The last six months? It’s been a ride, like being a child in the backseat of the car. Someone else is driving and you don’t know where you’re going. You fall asleep and wake up to a new country, a new experience. You get out, do whatever needs to be done, and, then, back into the car you go, for the next segment. I really enjoy making art, but I do find the journey as an artist scary. You do the best that you can with each new work you make, each new exhibition you install. Yet, what determines where you will show, or the direction your career is heading? Those things I feel are dependent on external factors one can’t fully control – people seeing and introducing your work to others, curators inviting you for exhibitions, galleries representing and taking a chance on you, collectors collecting your work.

Fig. 2

Donna Ong

*Secret, Interiors:**Chrysalis (22)*

Remake for Kwandu

Biennale, Taipei 2008

2.5 x 200 x 120 cm

Household and DIY

objects, furniture and

acrylic spray paint



I'm definitely not complaining; I feel *über*fortunate and blessed in my career, so far. Well, after coming back to Singapore from a three month residency in Japan, I was invited to do a show at the end of June 2008 in the Eslite Gallery in Taipei, titled *Coffee, Cigarettes and Phad Thai*, curated by Eugene Tan. Then it was a mad rush to prepare a new work for the Singapore Art Museum's *8Qrate: School* exhibition that opened in August 2008. From August to September, I had to take a break, and just bummed around – I knew I needed to rest and, also, I really did not want to burn out, or worse, start making art on auto pilot. At the end of September, I flew to Taipei again; this time to install two works for the Kwandu Biennale, *I have a Dream*, which featured 10 artists and their chosen curators (we got to pick our own curators). The museum had funded my project by selling a former work to a Taiwanese collector. *Secret, Interiors: Chrysalis (20)* was shown at the 2006 Singapore Biennale. Unfortunately, because this work had taken up so much space in my home, I had just thrown everything away. So my October and November was also taken up with recreating that work. And in October, I was invited to be a part of the 11th International Architecture Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, *Singapore Supergarden; An Ecosystem of Design Thoughts*.

It feels like I'm saying too much.

Weng Choy. No. Please continue. I want to suggest this intensity of activity.

Donna. All right. So December 2008 was spent preparing for my solo show in Tokyo at the Wada Fine Arts Gallery for the first week of January 2009. That was nerve-racking because it was my first gallery selling show. Previously, I had never faced the pressure of having to sell works. Then it was three weeks in Singapore to rework an existing piece to show in the Jakarta Biennale, which opened on the 6th of February 2009. At the same time, I also researched a new work for the group show, *Some Rooms*, which will be presented by Osage Gallery in Hong Kong, curated again by Eugene Tan, who has been very supportive of my work (he was curator of the 2006 Singapore Biennale). The Osage show will open on the 27th of February. And also in January, in addition to these other preparations, I've had to set up an installation for my work at Singapore Tyler Print Institute, which resulted from a two week residency I did with them last year. That show will be opening in February as well. As I write to you, I am currently in Jakarta with big panda eyes, having spent all of last night installing my work to make the opening today. I'm glad everything is almost finished and I'm looking forward to the opening party!

Weng Choy. And I thought I was busy. I'm glad you've catalogued your activity in some detail. It gives a sense of incessant productivity, a mode which many artists I know cannot seem to escape. On the one hand, that

intensity is important – one develops one’s practice by working very hard – but on the other hand, what worries me is how such productivity is framed, in larger terms. I realise you don’t think of your practice as national service, but you are ineluctably contributing to the goal of putting Singapore or Singapore artists on the world art map. Maybe we can return to that issue later. But I’d like to first talk more about your own sense of how you fit into the art world. You suggest that you are not quite in control of your career; that you’ve been very lucky to be presented with all these opportunities, which you’ve taken up with enthusiasm.

Donna. For me, the relationships in the art world – between curator and artist, artist and critic, gallery and collector, and so on – these seem opaque to me. Like some kind of exclusive club that one can only enter by invite.

Weng Choy. But you are doing very well. You are being invited. What if the invitations stopped coming? Because, from what I hear you saying, it seems less like the opportunities are coming your way mainly because you are doing good work. Rather, luck plays a huge part. This reminds me of Woody Allen’s film, *Match Point*. The central question of the film, concerning a professional tennis player with social-climbing aspirations, is whether it’s better to be good at what you do – such as playing tennis – or to be lucky. Sorry to spoil the film, but the answer is the latter: luck. The protagonist literally gets away with murder.

Donna. To be very honest, I really don’t know where I am heading. Like I mentioned before, it is like being a child in the backseat of the car, and there’s someone else driving. Yes, I can determine certain factors – like what type of work I want to make, and where I would like to show. I prefer to make installations for exhibitions, to be an exhibition artist as compared to a gallery artist. And I know that I should push myself, and develop my work deeper and further.

Although I plan projects and produce some of them in my studio on my own budget, the ambition and scale of an art work, as well as the scale and kind of audience who sees it, all that is ultimately determined by those outside factors one can’t fully control. Funding, invites to solo or group exhibitions, media coverage and serious criticisms, all that is difficult, if not impossible for me to plan and to make happen on my own.

About being an up-and-coming artist: I guess the problem with being positioned that way is that it is a temporary condition. You’re everyone’s favourite today, yet tomorrow, there will be someone younger and more up-and-coming than you. I’m not in anyway deluded that my being framed as an up-and-coming artist guarantees long lasting success. But I’m in this for the long haul. So I’m excited to get the privileges that come

Fig. 3

Donna Ong

In the Secret, In the Quiet Place
2008

40 x 40 x 40 cm

10 miniature installations
produced from plastic toys,
glue and acrylic spray paint

In the Secret, In the Quiet Place is a series of eight miniature installations placed within the rectangular openings of a standard shelf. Made in response to the artist's three-month stay in Japan under a residency programme, they reflect the uniquely "Japanese" living conditions of the residency — the intensely private, secret interior both metaphorically and physically; the cramped living conditions of Tokyo city life; the solitude and loneliness of the outsider; and the rich imaginative fantastic worlds the Japanese dream up and inhabit so easily.









Fig. 4
 Donna Ong
The Meeting 2008
 1200 x 1100 x 2800 cm
 5 channel video, black and
 white photographs, table
 and electric lamps

Based on the 1927 Friendship Doll Project, *The Meeting* is a series of short black and white films, where the dolls from two different countries (Japan and America) encounter each other within the interior of various dollhouses. Each of the 15 meetings is similarly staged, with two dolls facing each other motionless in a darkened interior. Light slowly passes through the openings of the space and illuminates the scene, both shading it with a changing atmosphere, as well as marking the passing of time. Sound (created by the sound artist, Isaac Teo) further enhances the ambience and ambiguity of the fifteen meetings — sometimes friendly, sometimes uncertain, at other times, openly hostile and threatening. In the Kwandu Biennale, *I have a Dream*, five scenarios are projected on the walls of the exhibition space. Each scene plays for approximately two minutes and then changes to another scene with a different pair of dolls. In the centre of the room lies an enormous table, on which are placed small palm-sized portrait photographs of individual old dolls arranged neatly in a grid format. The images, rendered in black and white, imbue a strange sense of heightened reality. The dolls closely resemble children, reminding us of the original child owners of the dolls as well as the original dream of the children of the Friendship Doll Project, which was to overlook the differences between the two cultures and build ties of friendship that would bring about peace.

with being viewed as the bright new kid on the block, but at the same time, I am very cautious about how my work and my persona are being exhibited, viewed and portrayed.

Weng Choy. I hope I didn't give the impression that I thought you've been haphazard, and not deliberate in taking up opportunities, or in the choices you've made in your career. So let's talk about the things that you do control; in particular, let's talk about the publicity you and your work have received, and how you've managed that.

Donna. As an installation artist, for me, the two most important things are, firstly, the realisation of the work (my pieces really require a lot of mental, physical and material effort on my part), and, secondly, the audience. For the first, I am trying to be focussed, and I only take up exhibition opportunities that give me the support and funding to realise projects that I am already developing. I am not interested in making work that is outside my interests; I'm not interested in being invited to an exhibition and having to respond to a theme which I have no personal affinity to. As for the second part, I see my interviews with magazines, broadcast media and journals as my part of my responsibility as an artist – it comes with the job. It's my duty to stand by my work and claim ownership. If need be, I should be able to account for my reasons for making the work, and to defend it.

I also see interviews as a tangent to my art making practice – my individual narrative adds to the work in some strange way. I am able to say things which perhaps are better said in words than in the art work. Perhaps I am not saying this too well right now, but I feel interviews allow me the chance to say things which are important to me – such as the motivation and personal narratives behind each piece – and that allows me to be more free in my art practice: I don't have to say everything I want to say in one work, I can just say one small thing at a time. The rest can wait for other occasions.

Interviews are also a means for me to better understand my own work – to get some feedback. Once you're out of art school, good critique can be next to impossible to find. Of course you get second hand criticisms – a friend heard someone talking about your work, who said this and that. Unfortunately, in some of the media that I've appeared in, the journalists are not the most informed, and the questions not the most intelligent. In fashion magazines, for example, the journalists are more interested in the quirks of your life rather than in your art practice. They want interesting people to interview – either an Obama (role model) or an Ozzie (weird character). I think I've been framed both ways over the course of last year.

Weng Choy. Do say more about the fashion magazines.

Donna. Recently, I've been getting a lot of interviews in fashion or women's magazines. In Japan, I was told by the organiser of the Tokyo Art Fair that the profile of collectors is changing: 70% of art collectors are now women, and they buy works between US\$600 to \$3,000. However, unlike traditional buyers, many of these women see art collecting not as an investment or as patronage, but as a design accessory – the perfect painting to go along with the designer couch, or the sculpture that expresses “my personal style” and “unique” personality.

Being in women's magazines is fun – I get to wear cool clothes and get my makeup done. Of course, it's not really about your art. You've got to understand it that way. You are portrayed as the cool or weird arty person and if you didn't agree to the interview, you would be replaced in a blink with the next cool or weird arty person on the list. You're a type, not an individual. But I do believe such interviews can have a positive impact, because unlike art journals, women magazines have a longer shelf life! The copies languish in dentist offices, hairdressers, and cafes, long after their issue date. I've had some friends tell me that their students are big fans of my work because they saw me in a women's magazine. The organiser of the Tokyo Art Fair attributes the event turning from the red to the black, to the change in advertising strategy. He concentrated his advertising in women's magazines, rather than the traditional art journals and periodicals.

Weng Choy. Could you talk a bit about how you feel being framed as a Singapore artist?

Donna. It's interesting because I've met a number of artists in my travels who have had a similar art education, such as studying at places like Goldsmiths; yet when we are shown in biennales, we are framed not by such associations as our “schools”, but as a Singaporean artist, an Indonesian artist, and so on. Being a Singaporean really doesn't come up when I'm making the work – it's not part of my creative and conceptual process – but it comes out when I show the work. I'm uncertain how I feel about this – about being framed as a Singaporean – but it does keep coming up. I spent nine years in England, some of my formative years, so my visual language, my aesthetics, is not entirely Singaporean, but has those other references and influences. For example, growing up watching the films that I did in England. That's a big part of one's cultural education.

But I have to say that I'm happy to be read as a Singaporean, although it sometimes means feeling some pressure to produce works that seems Singaporean. And I don't want people to read too much into the work

Fig. 5
Donna Ong
The Sixth Day 2008
500 x 500 x 2.7 cm
Pearls, glass ball
ornaments, plastic plants,
lead marbles, crystal and
glass bowls and jars, wire
spides, pearl headed pins,
lamps, glass tank and
furniture





that it is mainly about the Singapore condition. Yet I also recognise that I am a product of a certain context. I came back to Singapore at a time when biennales in Asia were taking off, when installation art became an established contemporary art practice in the region, and when the Singapore government wanted to break into the international art world. I've had opportunities to get scholarships, meet curators, and I realise I am a beneficiary of all this. It would be hypocritical to think I am independent of it. It would be much more difficult, for instance, if I were to stay in England, and try to make it as a contemporary artist in that context.

Anyhow, let me turn this around and ask you some questions. What do you think about this whole international art circuit? Who do you see as the major players? Why is contemporary art so popular now? Everyone seems to be getting into the game, corporations, governments. For an artist, it kind of feels like you invited five people to an intimate dinner, and a hundred strangers show up with their boom boxes, booze and attitude.

Weng Choy. The art circuit, well, there's so much to say about it. So let me keep my remarks to biennales, curators and criticism, and I'll speak in more general terms. I really don't have much to say about who I think are the major players, and what is trendy. I have my opinions, like everyone else in the art field. But let me talk instead about some of my motivations for interviewing you. As a critic, I am slow to write about new artists. I tend to write about a handful of people, and I return again and again to their works, and to certain themes and issues. But I recognise that it's important to get out of one's comfort zone, and see new things. While I have been critical of the "new", of how it is framed by the logics of relentless consumption, there is of course another dimension to the new, and that is radical change. I've been meaning to start writing about artists who are new to me, and also to write about, to use that dreaded phrase, up-and-coming artists. But I think it would be wrong to write about new artists in order to write about them as symptoms of a larger problematic – of newness in contemporary art, for instance. Every time I embark on writing about someone, it's like starting a relationship with an individual, so understanding the specificity of that person is paramount; moreover,

I'm usually interested in long-term relationships. I'm that kind of critic. Which contrasts with my image of what I think of certain star curators, who are promiscuous in their relationships with artists, not all of which can be long-term.

I don't think we need to rehash how the art world as a system is predicated on the ceaseless production of the new. But what I've wanted to point out is how difficult it is to resist that. Years ago, I was rather critical of biennales and their curators, but more recently, I've been aiming my criticism at the way we talk and write about these events. One can criticise biennale-type exhibitions for being the major mechanisms of global art spectacle and consumption, but I think there's more to them than that, and we have conceded too much when we understand them in those conventional ways, and our criticisms, no matter how strident, only reinforce those conventions. Furthermore, curators usually derive their own discourses from critical writing, so critics should think twice when they are so derisive and dismissive of curator-speak.

I've hoped that this interview might be an occasion for what I think criticism in general should attempt: to slow things down, and to open a space to reflect on the many processes that we all get so caught up in. This could be called the moment of the "now" – that is contemporary criticism's moment: to try and apprehend the "now", rather than get caught up and be a cheerleader for the "new".

1. See for instance, Lee Weng Choy, "Authenticity, Reflexivity & Spectacle: or, the Rise of New Asia is not the End of the World", (reprint) in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985*, ed. Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005); "Just What is It that Makes the term Global-Local so Widely Cited, yet so Annoying?", (reprint) in *Over Here: International Perspectives on Art and Culture*, ed. Jean Fisher and Gerardo Mosquera (Boston: MIT Press and New Museum, 2004); and "McNationalism in Singapore", in *House of Glass: Culture, Modernity, and the State in Southeast Asia*, ed. Yao Souchou (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2001).
2. Sanjay Krishnan, "Singapore: Two Stories at the Cost of One City," *Commentary* no. 10 (1992), 81.
3. In March 2000, the "Renaissance City Report," presented the government's current vision to promote arts and culture. As the then Minister for Information and the Arts Lee Yock Suan announced, there are two aims: "First, it is to establish Singapore as a global city of the arts. We want to position Singapore as a key city in Asia and as one of the cultural centers in the world. The idea is to be one of the top cities in the world to live, work and play in.... Second, it is to provide cultural ballast in our nation-building efforts." The full text of Lee's speech can be found on the Singapore Government's website: http://app.mica.gov.sg/Data/o/PDF/2_FinalRen.pdf.

Fig. 1

Luis Jacob

*A Dance for Those of
Us Whose Hearts Have
Turned to Ice, Based on the
Choreography of Françoise
Sullivan and the Sculpture
of Barbara Hepworth
(With Sign-Language
Supplement)* 2007

Video (DVD), colour, silent,
08'35 mins. Three-channel
video installation with
free-standing wall, HD
video projection, television
monitors, and area rug;
reading area with 16-page
brochure, teak-root chairs,
mirror-polish chrome table,
and handwoven basket

Overall installation

dimensions:

426 x 365 x 240 cm

Courtesy of Birch Libralato,
Toronto



Opening A Closing Door: Feminist and Queer Artists as Historians

Helena Reckitt

While chatting to a university art teacher recently, I mentioned my interest in the work of feminist artists. "Feminism!" she exclaimed, as if greeting a long lost friend, "How fascinating. I used to follow feminism... in the eighties." One of her female colleagues, overhearing our conversation, interjected consolingly. "You're a feminist. So you must find the younger generation terribly disappointing." Although such comments long ago stopped surprising me, and I've become used to defending feminism against charges of being deeply anachronistic and tragically unhip, this exchange briefly caught me off guard. For although I couldn't find the words to say so right then, I recently have realised, unexpectedly and with delight, that many younger people share both my fascination with feminism's history and my belief in its continued relevance.

Particularly striking are the many smart, engaging contemporary artists whose work delves into feminist history. In many cases born during or after the era of women's liberation, they nonetheless identify intensely with the movement. Seeking information about figures and events both iconic and obscure, these artists have become historians. They build on Virginia Woolf's maxim that "we think back through our mothers if we are women" to continue second wave feminism's recovery of women "hidden from history." By animating activities and artworks that they previously would have known through photographs, fuzzy videotape or hearsay, they forge affective connections to the past that exceed citation or homage. They know that they cannot reproduce earlier times faithfully or return to a coherent past. But by devising portals between now and then, they suggest that both are mutable. Personal and institutional memories are unstable, memorials take the form of transient performances or events, a self-aware anachronism favours obsolete and outdated symbols and media, and historical ideas and images become common property to be freely sampled, circulated and adapted.

Fantasy, glamour, humour and irreverence, often considered scarce in the women's movement, prevail. Eyes as feminist as they are queer scan social and art histories for feminist, woman-centred and gay male experiments. Rather than enacting the close one-to-one identifications of identity politics, this new art spans gender, race and generation. Women and gay male artists channel the work of female artistic icons while lesbians "strap on" elements of gay male culture. Euphorically queering everything in sight, they pillage our collective archives to update and replenish them. Far from historiography's conventionally fusty rummagings, this historical research is deeply embodied and sexually charged. "I pursued texts with the dogged energy I usually reserve for cruising," writes the British author Neil Bartlett in his book about Oscar Wilde. "I became excited by the smallest hints; I scrutinised every gesture for significance; sometimes I simply stood close and waited for a response. I went to the most unlikely places." This desire to connect with historical precedents through re-enactment and reconstruction brings to mind the Dutch philosopher Rosi Braidotti's account of embodiment as "a portion of living memory that endures, that lasts, that goes on – for a while – by undergoing constant internal modifications following the encounter with other bodies and forces [...] desire and yearning for inter-connection with others lies at the heart of subjectivity."² Fantasies of ingesting the other implied by such embodied approaches also recall Freud's characterisation of identification as a preliminary stage of object-choice: "The ego wants to incorporate this object into itself, and, in accordance with the oral or cannibalistic phase of libidinal development in which it is, it wants to do so by devouring it."³

This archival link to the past has a living, breathing complement in the apprenticeships that operate through institutionalised student-teacher relationships as well as social networks and "secret" collaborations with artists both living and dead. The Conceptual feminist American artist Mary Kelly, whose teaching, writing and art shaped successive feminist generations, recently has brought ideas of mentorship and inheritance into her work. Her three-part light box *Flashing Nipple Remix, #1* (2005) depicts women dressed in black with flashlights hoisted on top of their breasts and crotches as they restage a snapshot from Kelly's archives of a Miss World demonstration from 1971 in which she participated. The first picture shows the women standing still, while the second and third – shot with a slow shutter speed – capture them jumping around, turning the lights into abstract swirls. Flashlights that had originally parodied the sexualisation of the Miss World contestants now hint at non-biological reproduction. Part of *Love Songs* (2005–07), Kelly's mixed-media installation exploring women's memories of and identifications with women's liberation, this work underscores the differences between the "then" that Kelly helped form and the "now" that she imagined while doing so. *Love Songs* "attempts to describe what is left after the specific demands of the moment have faded, and what, if anything, is passed on from one generation to the next."⁴ Underscoring activism and art's shared affective nature, *Love Songs* encourages

the hope that radical movements can catalyse anyone who encounters them, however “belatedly”. “I came late to feminism,” recalls American art critic Johanna Burton,

by which I mean that I was born in the early 1970s. In that way, of course, I “missed” the *being-there* part of a movement [...] to which I felt nonetheless totally cathected and totally indebted [...] my first encounters with feminism – its histories and its conversations – were taken up from the double divide of time and place. This, I realise now, made my discovery of its figures, its terms, and its relevance all the more potent. For however “late” I had arrived to feminism, it seemed urgent and relevant and powerful – a tincture still waiting to be drunk.⁵

The affective results of belated events also figure in the work of Olivia Plender, including the literal uses of channelling other voices that the British artist explores in her graphic novel *A Stellar Key to the Summerland* (2007). The book shows how women in the Spiritualist Movement that developed in mid-nineteenth century rural New York, and is still practised in parts of England and Scotland, used their positions as spirit guides to address political gatherings where they expounded radical ideas about female suffrage and the abolition of slavery under the guise of channelling the dead. In the feminist continuum that Plender evokes, demands for social change survive across time and space, articulated through previously unimaginable bodies and contexts.

Concepts of channelling spirits from “the other side” also resonate with the generative effects that artistic precursors have for Canadian artist Luis Jacob. Inspired by *From Sea to Shining Sea*, AA Bronson’s 1987 survey of artist-directed activity in Canada, in 2002 Jacob curated *Golden Streams: Artists’ Collaboration And Exchange In The 1970s*. Taking Bronson’s project as central to the creation of a Canadian artists’ culture, Jacob built on Bronson’s desire to make something from nothing:

What do you do when there is no art scene that you can relate to? More strongly: What do you do when the agents whom you are supposed to rely upon to establish your legitimacy as an artist *themselves lack this legitimacy in your eyes?* Well, perform a scene, perform an audience, in order to summon what does not exist.⁶

By alluding in his title to the sexual practice of golden showers, Jacob gives Bronson’s ideas of national collectivity a decidedly perverse twist. This productive use of historical precedents also informs Jacob’s installation *A Dance for Those of Us Whose Hearts Have Turned to Ice, Based on the Choreography of Françoise Sullivan and the Sculpture of Barbara Hepworth (With Sign-Language Supplement)* (2007), which centres on a video of the queer performer Keith Cole dancing (naked in one version, clothed in another) in a snowy landscape (Fig. 1).

As the title indicates, Cole channels two female artists from the 1940s: the Quebecoise choreographer and painter Françoise Sullivan, part of the Canadian avant-garde's defining movements, and the British sculptor Barbara Hepworth, who invested inert matter with life-like vitality. Beyond suggesting that geography affected the comparative fame and obscurity of these pioneering artists, *A Dance...* underscores the productive impact of two women's work on that of this gay male artist half a century later (Col. pl. 3).

However, this relationship can also run the other way, as it does when American artist Emily Roysdon conjures up radical sexual and artistic precursors that our era of compromise and conservatism would sooner forget. The photographs in *untitled (David Wojnarowicz project)* (2001) depict friends of Roysdon wearing a picture of the deceased artist and activist as a mask. *untitled...* builds on Wojnarowicz's *Arthur Rimbaud in New York* (1978–79) for which he photographed men (and sometimes cardboard figures) wearing an image of the French poet over their face while performing criminal activities like shooting up or urinating in public. One picture in Roysdon's update shows a mask of Wojnarowicz's face staring out uncannily from a crowd. Another depicts a female figure lying on a bed, naked apart from underpants, a syringe stuck into her thigh; masturbating a strap-on dildo. For Roysdon as for Jacob, re-enactment bridges both generation and gender. However, in an important reversal of gay men's fascination with female divas, Roysdon uses Wojnarowicz's legacy as a foundation from which to affirm the eroticism of art and activism. Wojnarowicz's project, cut short by his death from AIDS, erupts with affective force. Conjuring the story of how a kiss awakes Sleeping Beauty, Roysdon proposes that the "kiss" of historical recuperation – a touch across time and place – releases frozen images from the past. This intimate desire to get under someone else's skin also intersects with Sherrie Levine's understanding of creative reciprocity: "I like to think of my paintings as membranes permeable from both sides, so that there is an easy flow between the past and the imaginary future, between my history and yours."⁷

This fluid exchange between feminism and queerness past, present and future has a further life in LTTR. The queer feminist art collective, formed in 2001 by artists Ginger Brooks Takahashi and K8 Hardy, later expanded to include Roysdon together with another artist, Ulrike Müller. Along with publishing an annual art journal whose format varies each issue and that includes literary, activist and critical texts as well as artists' projects and multiples, LTTR organises exhibitions, performances, screenings, readings, workshops and read-ins. Like second wave cultural feminists, though less evidently angry, LTTR creates alternative, affirmative spaces. As Roysdon says, "We are not protesting what we don't want, we are performing what we want."⁸ Traces of the genderqueer past reverberate through their projects, yet LTTR members raid the icebox partly to replenish it with their queer feminist projects. As suggested by the third issue of their journal, titled "Do You Wish To Direct Me?" and inspired by Lynda Benglis's auto-erotic video *Now* (1973): "Sometimes,

when you call, what you get back is both an echo and a response. The residual pleasure makes you want to call again.”⁹ LTTR’s concern with retrieving and creating heroines and heroes – what Roysdon calls *Mythical Images* – promotes a non-biological, decidedly queer understanding of reproduction, inheritance and kinship. Roysdon writes of “Spinning histories wide, looking far and queering all that we can,” and notes that “the ravaging of our communities through AIDS and the straight world we live in” has made queers “less willing to forgo our icons and the lessons from the past. We have had the opportunity to cull our history and in that action we perform our failure.”¹⁰

The expansive notion of “spinning histories” epitomises the horizontal model of collaboration advocated by LTTR, and their commitment to initiating projects with open calls for participation. As the American critic Julia Bryan



Fig. 2
Emily Roysdon
POW 2005
Video stills
Courtesy the artist

Wilson notes, “Promiscuity, whether sexual or – in the case of LTTR as an organization – curatorial, generates all-important moments of unexpected connection.”¹¹ Performing failure is also key. For all their visibility as a group, LTTR members court the mishaps inherent to experimentation just as they mistrust celebrity culture and forms of cultural representation that fix and neutralise difference. Roysdon’s artworks aim for a condition of simultaneous “ecstatic resistance and structural collapse.”¹² The looped video *POW* (2005) depicts Roysdon writing on chalkboard: “SURPRISE, I KNOW THIS IS NOT OUR AREA OF INTEREST BUT...” and “POW”, sometimes adding “ER” beneath it (Fig. 2, Col. pl. 4). Meanwhile another woman climbs into the frame only to fall out of it repeatedly. Simultaneously embracing and renouncing pedagogical authority, *POW* suggests the ecstasy and exhaustion of feminist action, where the “pow” of “Sisterhood is Powerful” still packs a punch. Exploring speech and communication, movement and gesture in her recent projects, Roysdon wonders how to form radical movements and keep them vibrant. Dressed as if for a dance rehearsal, the shoeless participants in the silent video *Social Movement* (2004–2005) tentatively mount a makeshift stage. Sometimes alone, sometimes in groups, at times forming elegant classical formations, they grasp microphone-free mike stands, their mistrust of dominant forms of speech stifling their urge to communicate.

But if *POW* and *Social Movement* fold queerness into a broader political mix, other works by LTTR artists and collaborators Ginger Brooks Takahashi and Olya Hogan Finley foreground the queering of their politics by positioning anonymous sex, S+M practices and gay male hanky codes as exemplary forms of generosity and community building. Nor are they alone in their queering of political community. One kindred spirit is Canadian artist Paige Gratland whose work salutes lesbian icons. *The Sontag* (2005), a clip-on lock of grey hair, enables wearers to resemble the celebrated author, while *Celebrity Lesbian Fists* memorialises lesbian writers like Eileen Myles and artists like Catherine Opie by casting their clenched hands in silicone. Gratland based the series on ceramicist and groupie Cynthia Plaster Caster’s practice of casting the penises of her rock n’ roll heroes. However, by foregrounding her heroines’ sexuality, Gratland playfully critiques lesbian celebrities who assure the straight world that “we are just like you”, instead equating lesbian visibility with political defiance and raunchy sex.

While Gratland pays tribute to her contemporaries, American artists K8 Hardy and Wynne Greenwood (also a regular LTTR collaborator) revisit 1970s-style feminism for inspiration in their performance and video *New Report* (2005). As anchors and reporters for the fictional feminist news station WKRH, “pregnant with information”, they log cross-country reports of anachronistic events such as bra-burning and the discovery of a dumpster full of a woman’s destroyed art (Fig. 3). Dressed in berets and black turtlenecks, with myriad woman signs adorning them and their graphics, Hardy and Greenwood eschew

Fig. 3
Wynne Greenwood
and K8 Hardy
New Report 2005
Video still



spectacle and professionalism for old-school, hand-held media aesthetics. Their campy, irreverent approach to signifiers of radical feminism evokes Elizabeth Freeman's application of "temporal drag" as key to cross-generational identification. "What makes a drag show ironic and draglike (rather than an earnest attempt to pass) is the performer's play with anachronism, ungainly or exaggerated gesture, off-beat timing, and peek-a-boo suspense" she argues, suggesting that engaging with concepts of temporal drag "might allow for a more dynamic sense of performance and performativity that encompasses reception as well as address, and might capture the gestural, sensory call-and-response by which gender is built or dismantled within a given space or across time."¹³ In no hurry to race ahead, *New Report* values interruptions, detours, mishaps and hesitations, chiming with Greenwood's request elsewhere: "CAN YOU PAUSE THAT FOR A SECOND... and let yourself groove."¹⁴ Taking time to consider the recent past, including that of the artwork and the dynamics between audience and performer, live and recorded footage, the video's pause encourages us to contemplate the confusions and indeterminacies of today's sex, gender, politics and art.

A more deadpan, though still witty, investigation of earlier political events is American artist Sharon Hayes' speech-based works which explore how history both informs the present and also gets distorted by mediation and narration. The four-part video *Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) Screeds #13, 16, 20, & 19* (2002) shows Hayes recounting from memory the audio letters that Patty Hearst recorded for her parents while a hostage of the revolutionary SLA. When Hayes forgets or fluffs her lines, an off-camera chorus of voices corrects her.

Prompting thoughts about the affective and mimetic powers of speech, and about our susceptibility to influence (Hearst later claimed that the SLA brain-washed her), this work suggests that Hearst was performing a role when she took on the revolutionary name “Tania” and joined her captors’ struggle. By re-enacting events that have become flattened-out media clichés – beautiful heiress becomes beret-wearing, gun-toting revolutionary – Hayes attempts to reinvest past events with historical texture and complexity. Hayes’ desire to avoid one-dimensional interpretations also informs how this work is exhibited. Rather than being screened, the videos sit stacked up in the gallery beside a note inviting visitors to take a copy and pass it along.

Clearly, Hayes objects to overly simple media images, and this resistance also inspires *In the Near Future* (2005). Carrying placards on the streets of various cities, Hayes revitalises slogans from earlier protests: “Who Authorized the War in Vietnam?”, “RATIFY E. R. A NOW!”, “Votes for Women” and “I AM A MAN” (from the Memphis Sanitation Workers’ strike of 1968). Demands that initially might seem anachronistic, a moment’s notice in each case reveals their continuing relevance. For instance, though suffragist Alice Paul wrote the Equal Rights Amendment in 1921, and it was introduced into Congress in 1923, it is still not law as the necessary 38 states never ratified it. Evoking the tense of the future anterior, an uncertain time when our political goals “will have been” successful and which the American philosopher Drucilla Cornell sees as central to feminist concepts of temporality, Hayes states:

I’ve started to think of myself almost as a placeholder. I’m holding the place of a kind of address that had meaning and resonance and impact at a certain moment in time. And I’m thinking about the possibility that this specific resonance and impact could be present for a future time.¹⁵

These performances might suggest that feminism and other radical movements whose time, rather than having passed, has not yet arrived, can retain their force when restaged under new conditions. Like *Symbionese Liberation Army Screeds*, *In the Near Future* operates in multiple ways. In the gallery, an uneven line of projectors shows slides of Hayes’ actions. As in real politics, we realise, Hayes’ protests were staged for the camera. Further complicating questions of real and staged, phrases such as “Nothing Will Be As Before” or “The American President Might Have to Call in the National Guard to Put This Revolt Down” do not stem from actual demonstrations but are fictional. Similarly propositional, her 2006 performance *Everything Else Has Failed! Don’t You Think It’s Time For Love?* has Hayes calling out on a busy New York street as if to a lost friend:

After all these various forms of communication have failed, I’m just standing on the street throwing the words out and hoping they’ll find a way. My interest is in laying political desire and personal desire on top of one another.¹⁶

Bound to fail, or at least not to succeed, these performances repeatedly return Hayes to the question of what it means to claim a public space and a public voice. This sense of perpetual incompleteness drives much of the art associated with today's deliberately fragmentary feminism, as when Paulina Ołowska follows still-captivating traces of female-centered pasts. Standing apart from feminist activism *per se*, the Polish artist's work frequently evokes creative women who worked before, outside, or alongside the women's movement (perhaps growing up under Communism has made Ołowska wary of mass movements). Her collages, paintings and performances are also more overtly stylish than Hayes' anti-aesthetic projects or Hardy and Greenwood's low tech, DIY performances and videos. Not that Ołowska doesn't sometimes evoke the unfinished quality of weathered fly posters, but she also exploits an alluring formal elegance and rhythm. Claiming "It is always somehow sweeter to work with a friend, or a ghost,"¹⁷ Ołowska often summons up female iconography from sources like fashion design and dance posters, and has collaborated with contemporary women artists like the American Frances Stark and the Scott Lucy McKenzie (including co-running the popular Nova Popularna bar in Warsaw in 2003) as well as dead ones like British pop artist Pauline Boty and Polish artist and designer Zofia Stryjenska. When referencing creative women, Ołowska often appropriates details of their biographies as well as their art. *Pauline Boty Acts Out One Of Her Paintings For A Popular Newspaper* (2006) depicts Ołowska painting the artist as she removes her shirt, a reference to Boty being photographed naked with her work in 1964 (the same year that Carolee Schneemann enthralled swinging London by performing *Meat Joy* naked, covered in paint—a performance that Boty attended). Ołowska identifies with Boty's wish to be a serious artist while remaining glamorous and sexual. In the case of Stryjenska, whose work was celebrated in pre-Communist Poland but neglected during the Communist era, Ołowska's declared affinity is even more overt. For her exhibition at the fifth Berlin biennial, Ołowska not only exhibited portraits of Stryjenska and copies of reproductions of her paintings, but also dedicated her section of the catalogue to photographs of the artist and diary entries written by Stryjenska during her own international debut in Paris.¹⁸ Skipping over the issues of authorial displacement and the myth of genius that concerned the appropriation artists of the 1970s and 1980s, Ołowska reconnects with feminist art history *à la* Linda Nochlin to make room for an artist excluded from the history books. Despite Stryjenska's seniority (and the fact that Stryjenska died in the year that Ołowska was born), the relationship that Ołowska evokes is one of sisterly kindred spirits.

However, Ołowska's desire to surround herself with female soul mates interests her more than 1970s-style feminism, as can be seen from her exhibition *She Had to Discard the Idea of the House as a Metaphor* (2004). Filling the gallery with portraits of women from the Bloomsbury group and displaying them on canvases mounted on casters, Ołowska created the atmosphere of a Modernist salon. The exhibition might sound like a Judy Chicago-esque congregation of great women from history, but mingling with talented eccentrics who forged their own unconventional



lives interests Olowska more than retrieving mythic heroines (Fig. 4). Her project chimes with *Being Boring*, the Pet Shop Boys 1991 ode to bohemian flamboyance. “I came across a cache of old photos,” the song begins, “And invitations to teenage parties/‘Dress in white’ one said, with quotations/From someone’s wife, a famous writer.” The “someone’s wife” is of course Zelda Fitzgerald and the “quotations” come from her article about the flapper:

The Flapper awoke from her lethargy of subdebism, bobbed her hair, put on her choicest pair of earrings and a great deal of audacity and rouge and went into battle. She flirted because it was great fun to flirt and wore a one-piece bathing suit because she had a good figure, she covered her face with powder and paint because she didn’t need it and she refused to be bored chiefly because she wasn’t boring.¹⁹

Pet Shop Boys salute Fitzgerald’s self-dramatisation and excess as an example that sustained them as they grew up gay in the north of England: “When you’re young you find inspiration/In anyone who’s ever gone/And opened up a closing door.” Like them, Olowska sees glamour and decadence as positive forces that sustain contemporary efforts to forge a creative life. The bob-haired flapper entices her far more than does the dungareed political militant. Refusing a certain feminist proscription of self-display, Olowska depicts herself and other beautiful women in her pictures, and sometimes gives performances too. Her appropriations of art and design from the Communist period also evidence her optimism about image-making. What some dismiss as propaganda, she values as examples of creativity that flourished under

Fig. 4
 Paulina Olowska
*Sie musste die Idee eines
 Hauses als Metapher
 verwerfen (She Had to
 Discard the Idea of the
 House as a Metaphor)*
 2004
 Kunstverein Braunschweig,
 Brunswick
 Installation view
 Courtesy of the Artist,
 Kunstverein Braunschweig
 and Metro Pictures

repression. It's a fascination with gesture, exuberant expression and the aesthetic possibilities of striking a pose that intersects with Luis Jacob's appreciation of unliberated movement in the work of Sullivan and Hepworth. Describing their work, Jacob writes of "the relationship between frozen desires, and the striving for personal freedom and social liberty."²⁰

One form of liberty, though, might be to break from society entirely, to disappear rather than be overlooked. Thus, where Olowska honours female artists who have not received their historical dues, the Dutch collaborative duo Bik Van der Pol explore a very different form of archival absence: deliberate disappearance. Part of their ongoing "Past Imperfect" project focuses on US artist Lee Lozano who, with her *General Strike Piece* and *Dropout Piece*, literalised Conceptual artists' preoccupation with dematerialisation by eschewing the art world and art making altogether. This self-erasure raises questions about the aesthetic and political efficacy of strategies of absence, non-compliance and refusal. Yet it also underscores the art market's ability to co-opt even the most resistant gestures: initially dismayed at the paucity of historical documentation about Lozano, Bik Van Der Pol became disillusioned when they discovered that the powerful art dealer Sprüth Magers had started to represent her estate.

Opening up the past to revision as they do, Olowska, Bik Van Der Pol and others recall Rosi Braidotti's Deleuzian account of memory as "fluid and flowing, it opens up unexpected or virtual possibilities [...] When you re-member in the intensive or minority-mode, in fact, you open up spaces of movement – of de-territorialisation – that actualise virtual possibilities which had been frozen in the image of the

past.”²¹ Yet despite, or perhaps because of, this revisionist turn, fears that our histories will stay frozen in the past remain. Perhaps these archival anxieties are inevitable. As Hal Foster has suggested, “For why else connect so feverishly if things did not appear so frightfully disconnected in the first place?”²² In “Feminist Art: A Reassessment,” the American artist and writer Mira Schor (who participated as a student in Womanhouse in 1972) and the American artist Susan Bee noted the “frustrating reality that once the feminist canon of 70s feminist art was in place, it has been seemingly as fixed as the first (male) art historical canon had been [...] many artists whose work was initiated by their generative encounter with early feminist art at the beginning of the movement [are] still excluded from this reinvestigation of the history of that time [...]”²³ But Schor and Bee aren’t the only ones to notice this stasis, and a similar desire to expand the feminist canon has prompted several recent initiatives. In the Netherlands, the curatorial project *If I Can’t Dance* has included exhibitions, performances and symposia, combining the work of contemporary practitioners with a strong archival focus. In the US, the major museum exhibition *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (2007) re-framed feminist art of the 1970s as a global phenomenon that encompassed many artists and artworks not typically associated with the women’s movement. The exhibition’s expansiveness (the videos alone were impossible to see in one visit) destabilised familiar art historical categories, introducing unexpected connections. Yet “Feminist Futures,” the symposium that accompanied *WACK!* and the concurrent exhibition of contemporary work *Global Feminisms*, focused less on the generative effect of such projects and more on fears for the future. “Ironically, given the title,” noted art historian Aruna D’Souza, anxieties proliferated,

about the inscription of feminism as a historical past as opposed to a current or future practice [...] question periods were filled by women asserting their roles in that history. There was nostalgia, yes, but also hostility toward a “younger” generation of feminists, a recurring claim that we (I include myself) were not adequately taking up the feminist banner.²⁴

To some commentators, the 1970s focus of recent projects represents an anti-intellectual tendency to downplay feminist theory. The American critic Rosalyn Deutsche, in a 2007 roundtable on “Feminist Time,” noted the absence of the polemical 1984–85 exhibition *Difference: On Representation and Sexuality* from lists of acknowledged precedents in *WACK!* and other current projects. This trend, to Deutsche, “stands for a tendency to suppress a particular difference, a specificity, that might be placed under the rubric ‘the eighties’ [which] goes along with another tendency: to look back on the women’s art movement as a time of ‘raw’ vitality and ‘messiness’ that was dampened by the so-called academicization of feminism in the 1980s.”²⁵

However, I see something more complex than a rejection of theoretical feminism in play. For one thing, most of these artists studied at institutions like UCLA and the Whitney Independent Study Program where they received

a thorough grounding in feminist theory from strong feminist teachers. So they needn't defend the influences that have thoroughly shaped them. Their ease with feminism and other theory means they're comfortable merely suggesting these facets of their work. Many of the theoretical concerns that we associate with the 1980s are alive and well in their works, from appropriating mass media images to provoking the subversive power of women's laughter. Moreover, contemporary genderqueer artists are familiar with Lacan's account of how subjectivity emerges with the acquisition of language, which they use to explore the violence inherent to identity and the performative nature of gender. Contemporary feminist artists know their theory. The question is whether their art history classes teach them enough about the breadth of art that the dialogue with feminism produced. The fact that many younger artists have become historians suggests that this appetite for an array of feminist and queer precursors remains unsatisfied. The American art historian Mignon Nixon suggests that paying attention to the dynamics of transference might help us to think through a certain antipathy to 1980s feminism that she has observed:

When feminism became the stuff of university seminars, it became subject to the dynamics of the pedagogic situation, which, being a scene of mastery, is structurally ambivalent . [...] Although many feminist teachers, both artists and academics, deployed psychoanalytic theory in their work and in their pedagogy to expose questions of authority and mastery, still, transference to a figure "presumed to know," as Lacan put it, is structural to the pedagogic dynamic and perhaps even the dynamic of viewing certain kinds of art. This happens even if the artist or teacher disavows the position of mastery [...] one way to consider the ambivalence and even antagonism that developed toward feminist discourse of the 1980s might be as a response to a perceived authority.²⁶

The polymorphousness needed to counter this mastery gives rise to the expansive, euphoric and omnivorous approach to creativity and community that run through these projects. Where the British film maker and theorist Laura Mulvey called for the destruction of conventional visual pleasures "to conceive a new language of desire",²⁷ contemporary artists forge feminist and queer pleasure from whatever means possible. Embracing ephemera, performance, process, open-endedness and tactility, they make art that diverges from the slick, closed surfaces and the "miming the master" mass media manipulations of Kruger, Levine, Holzer et al. This "yes, and" approach to aesthetic options chimes with Austrian artist Ulrike Müller's remarks that:

In my own fraught relationship with identity, I've learnt a lot about roles. Rather than take a defensive position, I say "yes" to all assumptions about my identity and continue doing what I do, hoping to produce productive queer inconsistencies.²⁸

Producing inconsistencies, disavowing mastery, practising more failure, artists send themselves “back to school” to search for the pioneers upon whose examples they improvise, and for the building blocks that will enable the creation of new movements. Instead of promoting oedipal fantasies of overthrowing the previous generation, their projects thrive on inter-generational networks of exchange and affiliation.

So how can we prevent the divisions, discussions, complexities and polemics that make feminist and queer history so vital from being diluted by bland generalisations? One example of what such a collaborative approach to the feminist past might look like is Kajsa Dahlberg’s *A Room of One’s Own/A Thousand Libraries* (2006). For this book and exhibition the Swedish artist persuaded public librarians from across Sweden to send her transcripts of readers’ marginal notes and underlinings left on the 1958 translation of Virginia Woolf’s 1929 book. Dahlberg then redrew their scribbles onto one copy, which she printed in an edition of 1000. With the quality of hypertext, or what the Canadian critic Jennifer Allen describes as “the collective instantaneity of a blog,”²⁹ these comments depict a feminist community formed through impassioned dialogue and communication. At times the annotations take over and make reading the text almost impossible, no doubt making Woolf, who apparently detested finding such marginalia, turn in her grave: the death of the author indeed! As if by way of answer, the most annotated section explicitly discusses collective influence and inheritance: “For masterpieces are not single and solitary births; they are the outcome of many years of thinking in common, of thinking by the body of the people, so that the experience of the mass is behind the single voice.”³⁰ This picture of a feminist community, fascinated by footnotes and intertextuality, underscores the queer habit of finding meaning in random evidence that Elizabeth Freeman terms “over reading.”

As the complexities and conflicts inherent to women’s lib and gay activism recede, we must retain this focus on negotiation and conversation, and avoid the uncritical celebration of previous eras that turns radical movements into marketing clichés. Nostalgia is potentially conservative, and the idea that “things ain’t what they used to be” and that we only repeat our predecessors’ gestures can paralyse activism and its energies. We must credit our precursors without slavishly erecting heroines and heroes, just as we must steer clear of artistic repetition that leans on other artists’ work to claim pedigree and prestige. At a recent symposium at The Power Plant in Toronto, British philosopher Simon Critchley criticised “mannerist” historical and artistic re-enactments that fetishise period detail, while Swedish curator Maria Lind objected to “one-to-one re-enactments” that shore up familiar histories without revealing hidden or suppressed dimensions.³¹

If we prevent re-making and citation from containing and diluting the past and its potential, we hold past and future open to negotiation, as the artists that I discuss here do admirably. Dangers of nostalgia and limitations of historical records aside, denying the need for historical knowledge, or letting others tell our

histories for us, diminishes the generative effect that a shared lineage affords, and the valuable sense of purpose that this gives – communicated across time and place, through figures living and dead – and that we still need in these frequently conservative, anti-feminist and homophobic times.

So to offer the art professor who was dismayed about the lack of feminism amongst younger generations the kind of belated rejoinder that the writer Theresa Duncan termed “the wit of the staircase”: younger people’s feminist inclinations don’t disappoint me at all. By “laying political desire and personal desire on top of one another”, as Sharon Hayes puts it, they understand how the past fuels the present and how radical movements whose time “has not yet come” can retain a vital force. Sustaining our less collectively-minded contemporary times, they keep us connected to earlier periods of feminist and queer activity even as the doors to radical histories threaten to close around us.

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Fig.1
Dan Arps
Explaining Things
2008
Installation view
Gambia Castle,
Auckland



Work-Life Balance: Recent Exhibitions by Dan Arps

Jon Bywater

... the supreme value of the New and of innovation, as both modernism and modernization grasped it, fades away against a steady stream of momentum and variation...

– *Fredric Jameson*¹

... chronic instability places in full view, during labor time as well as during free time, the naked *rules* which artificially structure the boundaries of action. ...to experience rules directly means also to recognize their conventionality and groundlessness. Thus, one is no longer immersed in a predefined “game,” participating therein with true allegiance. Instead, one catches a glimpse of oneself in individual “games” which are destitute of all seriousness and obviousness, having become nothing more than a place for immediate *self-affirmation* – a self-affirmation which is all the more brutal and arrogant, in short, cynical, the more it draws upon, without illusions but with perfect momentary allegiance, those same rules which characterize conventionality and mutability.

– *Paolo Virno*²

Work-life balance is about effectively managing the juggling act between paid work and other activities that are important to us – including spending time with family, taking part in sport and recreation, volunteering or undertaking further study.

– *Department of Labour, Te Tari Mahi*³

Dan Arps' recent exhibitions dramatise a worst case scenario for anyone who fears that contemporary art is at risk of becoming a hopelessly marginal and irrelevant activity. In part through their titles, the gallery space is cast on different occasions as a bunker, a ranch and a dungeon, venues for escapist retreat. Windows are painted out, papered over and boarded up, physically blocking out the world outside. Upon entering, we face the potential embarrassment of walking in on what appears to be an interrupted and abandoned but nonetheless private space, whose contents appear as if unprepared for general viewing. Empty plastic bags, wisps of straw, newspaper, or a single, crushed beer can are left littering the floor. Chairs and tables are arrayed as if for "small group activities" in the vicinity of self-help tapes and management diagrams. In these playrooms-come-hideouts, the crafted images and objects that take up the positions of paintings and sculptures are often associated with references to therapy. It is unclear who – the artist, the audience, or even gallery staff – might be here for self-improvement. Childishly crude gestures in paint and modeling materials mingle with tawdry mass cultural detritus and semi-literate expressions of crackpot ideas.

Arps' art, however, goes on. The self-deprecatory caricature of his own enterprise that can be discerned in the work is obscured and complicated by the commitment evident, first and most simply, in its consistent public exhibition. In contradiction to the hermeticism Arps' scenarios imply, the pleasures of these shows lie precisely in their vigorous and perceptive curiosity about other art and the rest of the world, and further, in the precision with which, from one work to the next, Arps hones an ability to highlight the intractable oddness of and interest in details of it. This familiar dynamic of consistency and refinement is one way to locate a sustaining momentum for his practice. In a typical inheritance from artistic modernism, formal and conceptual issues are trialed and resolved, reworked and recycled from exhibition to exhibition. In a way exemplary of much contemporary art, then, the originality of his work might best be understood at the level of a sensibility or aesthetic more than at that of concept or form, and the newness of each development importantly relative to his own practice as much as it is to a wider discourse.

In attempting to articulate something of Arps' particular aesthetic and its emotional tonality, I would like to consider his work in relation to a general question raised by the way that consumer capitalism and artistic modernism have both valued newness. His work is filled with commercial goods and processes, frequently drawing on the impact of dated design or material from subcultures not usually at home in an art context. The way his work treats the logics of artistic modernism and industrial or technological invention, then, makes it a pertinent case through which to revisit a deep pessimism about the effect of the convergence of their valuations. Accepting that "the underlying condition of the original" may be "the ever-present reality of the

copy”,⁴ aesthetic effectiveness seems nonetheless tied in some way to newness. If this coincides with the market’s demand for novelty, is artistic invention merely another symptom of a hegemonic capitalist mode of production? By way of an answer, I hope to suggest how at the same time that it cynically parodies aspirations for art’s value, Arps’ work might all the more clearly evince one.

I

Arps’ work sits within the broad swathe of sculptural possibilities that lie in activating the formal properties of materials equally with their connotative, acculturated art and non-art associations. Within this wide field, the particular strategies and style of American artist Jessica Stockholder – who exemplarily extends Allan Kaprow and Robert Rauschenberg’s assemblage technique further into three dimensions on an architectural scale – and German sculptor Isa Genzken – who extensively incorporates pre-fabricated commercial materials such as toys and posters in her assemblages and environments – serve as well as any as basic reference points for Arps’ work within the programmes of European and American museums.

Quite unlike Stockholder, though, Arps’ simultaneously literal and abstract deployment of materials draws together elements of modern expressionism and formalist abstraction with *objets trouvés* in collage and assemblage through a conceptual approach as much as a formal one. His exhibitions of the past two years – including *Gestapo Pussy Ranch* (The Physics Room, 2007), *Affirmation Dungeon* (Gambia Castle, 2007, and Jack The Pelican, 2008), *Motivation Bunker* (Neon Parc, 2008), *Fractal Tears* (Michael Lett, 2008), and *Explaining Things* (Gambia Castle, 2008) – in various ways cast the gallery space as some kind of refuge,⁵ within which exist elements that are intended to function independently as individual paintings and sculptures, often distinguished by quite conventional forms, including wall works and free standing objects.

In *Explaining Things* (Fig. 1), for example, a found, handwritten text appended to the gallery door, while a work in itself might “explain” the boarded-up gallery windows, and so an implied situation within which to consider the other elements of the installation:

DARREN,
THIS PLACE
IS UNDER
POLICE
SERVAILANCE
ENTER AT
YOUR OWN
PERIL. HOPFULLY
ILL BE HERE WE
CAN TALK.

Similarly, a simple bed made up on the floor under the windows in *Gestapo Pussy Ranch* suggests the invisible presence of at least one actor who may or may not be distinct from the author of the other objects in the room. More theatrically, certain points in the room are under surveillance by a closed-circuit video, playing on a small black-and-white monitor. Arps' conceits take up a possibility prominently enacted by Marcel Broodthaers' classic late work, *Décor: A Conquest* (ICA, 1975), in which the presence of studio lighting implies the status of the work as a set. Indeed, in *Explaining Things* a set of slightly broken outdoor furniture might allude obliquely to Broodthaers' piece.

This scenographic presentation finds a precedent in art made in Aotearoa/ New Zealand in the implicit inhabited environments of works by L. Budd and et.al., such as *Simultaneous Invalidations, Second Attempt* (Artspace, 2004) with its camp stretcher in a sideroom off the main gallery. Although lacking the deliberate ambiguity of et. al.'s collective authorship, the stagings authored by Arps nonetheless also give a sense of plural points of view or multiple voices. Even without someone apparently sleeping on the floor, the simultaneous deployment of a number of visual languages establishes a novelistic heteroglossia that is a key feature of his work.

Readymades of the most banal and barely manipulated kind – sheets of newspaper slumped not quite flat on the floor of one room in *Affirmation Dungeon*, for example – contrast with collages and over-painting on commercial prints and mass produced ornaments. Expulsive, expressionist gestures in paint and modeling clay are applied to slickly moulded and Photo-shopped commercial products. These include, of course, images and objects made by other authors, but also evoke clearly defined genres, including some within, for example, science fiction, fantasy art, pornography and advertising, that also contribute to the plurality of conventions in play.

Unified as they often are within a single, if opaque, narrative by Arps' titles and other cues, our awareness of the elements of his installations doubles. While the more conventionally crafted elements appear both as paintings and sculptures and as conceptualist props in the roles of those things, the deadpan found objects also read as careful formal gestures, albeit of a frequently nonchalant kind. In *Fractal Tears*, for example, a dirty white plastic coat hanger suspended on a string is conspicuous as a new element in Arps' repertoire of objects to someone following his practice, and so draws attention to itself as a kind of sculptural mobile, at the same time that it appears as simply an exceptionally ugly, disposable variation on a familiar practical form (Fig. 2).

The use of such simple, everyday objects often seems to follow an intuitive, site-specific rationale. As a fellow member of the Gambia Castle gallery collective, he shares concerns with several of his peers in activating formal effects that both draw on and de-literalise commercial imagery and forms while

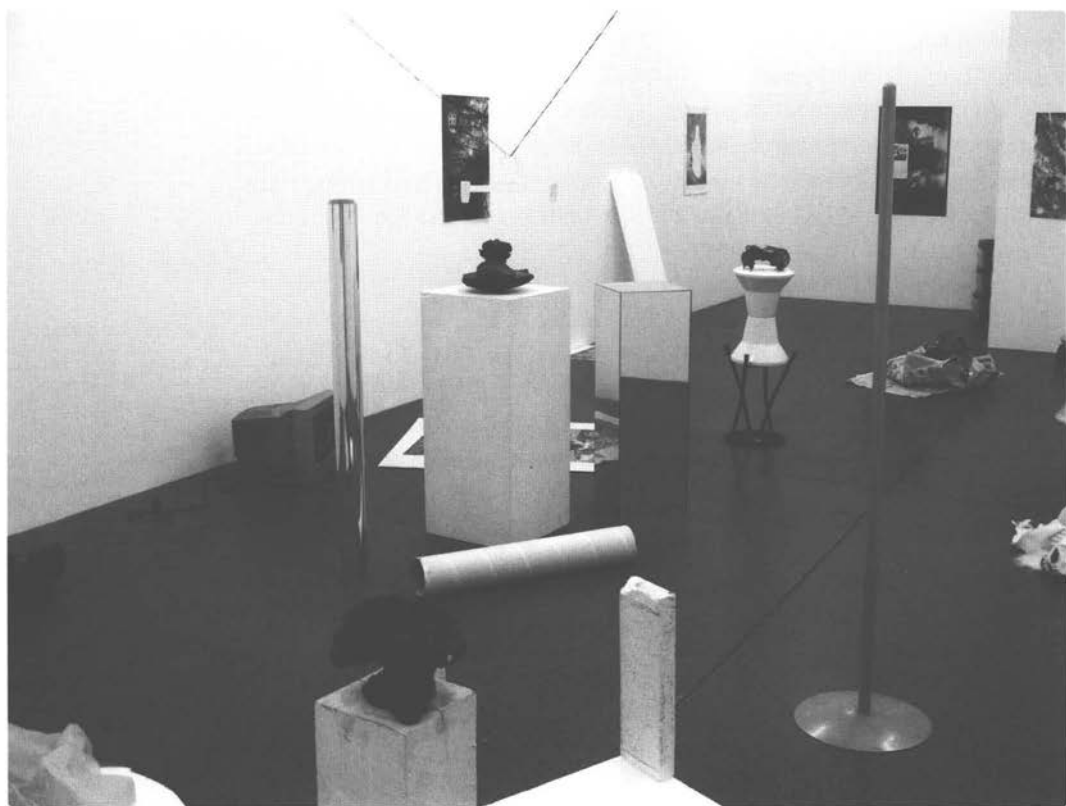


Fig. 2
Dan Arps
Fractal Tears
2008
Installation view
Michael Lett Gallery,
Auckland

responding to the characteristics of the display space. Tahi Moore, for example, shares with Arps the repeated tropes of the empty drink bottle and the object leaned against the wall. Writing about *Affirmation Dungeon* (Gambia Castle, 2007), Moore articulates his view of the intuitive decisions involved in specific installations. When it comes to accounting for the role of the physical space in the work, he expresses himself paradoxically: “It’s this feeling of entering a room and there’s a room, which describes the feeling of another space.” “There’s a lot going on when there’s not much there...”

Even at its most apparently haphazard or casual, the non-standard arrangement of components contributes to a sense of scrutiny that these formal strategies bring to the components of Arps’ shows. This effect is over-determined by the character of the fictional set-ups and of many of the found materials used that – in another way and perhaps more obviously – brings into question the status of Arps’ ostensibly abstract and expressionist works especially, associating them with the indulgent, ordinary and abject. As so far only noted in passing, the damaged and discarded, paranoia, fantasy and therapy are recurrent references in the work.

In *Gestapo Pussy Ranch*, the over-painted commercial posters on the walls include soft porn and science fiction imagery. A circle of chairs in one corner provides a space to listen to a self-help cassette for parents on the subject of



Fig. 3
Dan Arps
Fractal Tears
(Therapy Object)
2008
Michael Lett,
Auckland

adjusting to children leaving home, and a collapsible picnic table marked with an A4 printout offering “outreach”⁶ holds amongst its contents a piece of cack-handed cane work, the exemplary craft form of the sheltered workshop. In *Explaining Things*, the furniture offers a place from which to view a grainy video compilation of Internet-sourced material on astral travel and other New Age spiritualism. The note to “Darren”, then, is only one among many details that establish a sense of the gallery as a refuge for some marginal or eccentric activity.⁷

The large silver form that dominates the room in *Gestapo Pussy Ranch* debuted at Michael Lett in a 2007 group show *ARPS/TEAGUE/GEORGETTI* under the title *Panax*. On the one hand it looks like a homemade and mangled stand-in for Ronald Bladen’s Minimalist benchmarks *The Cathedral Evening* (1969) or *Three Elements* (1965), recently exhibited together at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. On another, it is like a cover version of American artist Eric Wesley’s less well known *PYC Corporate Icon* (2004), as illustrated at the time in *Flash Art*. In either case, its D.I.Y. finish and science fiction overtones, makes it as critic David Levinson wrote: “... analogous to an unconvincing prop – with the thing it’s imitating being modern art.” Its homemade look suggests fandom. Formalist art-making, the implication seems to be, is a geeky and weird, perhaps lonely activity.

In *Fractal Tears*, old works of Arps’ turn up broken and over-painted, titled as “therapy objects” (Fig. 3, Col.pl. 6). These complex, formless lumps – akin perhaps to Franz West’s “Passsstücke” (“prostheses” or “adaptives”) – are presented on actual plinths and plinth-like inverted stools that stage the failure of high modernist formalism’s attempt to remove itself from the human life world while acknowledging, and recuperating, its underlying fascinations. The expressionist qualities of these abstract moments are more than simply quoted, formally rigorous according to a nuanced personal aesthetic of the artist’s, yet hold in reserve another life as a sign for themselves. They embody a self-consciousness about the meaning of their form as identifiably art-like.

As well as modeling the pluralistic character of general visual experience, Arps’ mixing of conceptualist and expressionist gestures also appears as a way of coping with the contemporary problem of negotiating an art practice with a potentially overwhelming awareness of other people’s practices and of possibilities for art. The Physics Room’s press release for *Gestapo Pussy Ranch* suggests that the show’s titular reference to the secret police of the Third Reich might be “... more emblematic of the tyranny of influence than actual... Nazis.” The relationship of the work to other practices positions the artist as a consumer of information under conditions where the modernist myth of originality or absolute newness has been dispelled, in part simply by the increasing availability of information. The provocatively hyperbolic formulations of Jean Baudrillard’s classic diagnosis that perform as well as describe an “ecstasy of communication” chime with Arps’ seemingly chaotic embrace of often relatively novel mass cultural items in an art context.

Writing even before the popular uptake of the Internet, Baudrillard characterised this emergent condition as involving:

... a whole pornography of information and communication, that is to say, of circuits and networks, a pornography of all functions and objects in their readability, their fluidity, their availability, their regulation, in their forced signification, in their performativity, in their branching, in their polyvalence, in their free expression...⁸

How then does the kind of “newness” I have begun to evoke in Arps’ practice – its continuity with and distinction from other practices, and the systems it sets up within which it can refine the experience it offers as it progresses – function within this post modern condition? I will return now in more detail to the gloomy diagnosis that all newness is reducible to the alienating momentum of capitalism.

II

The coincidence between consumer capitalism’s and artistic modernism’s shared concern for “making it new” has long been noted. American Imagist poet John Gould Fletcher’s parodic review of the text of a magazine advertisement joked in 1915 that the market’s “best-paid, least rewarded” creatives seemed to be “getting quite up-to-date.”⁹ Theorising the convergent logics of aesthetics and the market, critics have tended to be pessimistic about the potential of avant-garde artistic production to be anything but complicit with capital. Seeing art in terms of the industrial mode of production, for example, Frankfurt School philosopher Theodor Adorno relegates its search for newness to a function of its commodity status:

Nouveauté [newness] is aesthetically the result of historical development, the trademark of consumer goods appropriated by art by means of which artworks distinguish themselves from the ever-same inventory in obedience to the need for the exploitation of capital, which, if it does not expand, if it does not – in its own language – offer something new, is eclipsed. The new is the aesthetic seal of expanded reproduction, with its promise of undiminished plenitude...¹⁰

Adorno continues by noting that “[a]rt is modern art through mimesis of the hardened and alienated; only thereby, and not by the refusal of mute reality, does art become eloquent; this is why art no longer tolerates the innocuous.”¹¹ Yet the aesthetic techniques historically deployed to reflect this hardness and alienation, often originally in intentional resistance to capitalism – collage, irony, novelty – are commonly recognised in this critical tradition to have become hallmarks of mass-market capitalism. The market has come to appear happy to accept any kind of art production with a commitment to radicalism and rule-breaking. In his review of artistic modernism’s legacy, British theorist Raymond Williams elaborates Fletcher’s link between the avant-garde and advertising:

What has quite rapidly happened is that Modernism quickly lost its anti-bourgeois stance, and achieved comfortable integration into the new international capitalism. Its attempt at a universal market, transfronter and transclass, turned out to be spurious. Its forms lent themselves to cultural competition and the commercial interplay of obsolescence, with its shifts of schools, styles and fashion so essential to the market. The painfully acquired techniques of significant disconnection are relocated, with the help of the special insensitivity of the trained and assured technicians, as the merely technical modes of advertising and the commercial cinema. The isolated, estranged images of alienation and loss, the narrative discontinuities, have become the easy iconography of the commercials, and the lonely, bitter, sardonic and skeptical hero takes his ready-made place as star of the thriller.¹²

Writing that these formal inventions “have become the new but fixed forms of our present moment,”¹³ Williams pre-empts the way American critic and Marxist political theorist Fredric Jameson cites the coincident artistic and commercial valuations of newness as a key antimony of the postmodern condition. The theoretical puzzle for those concerned with understanding a way ahead, as he sees it, is in thinking a way past a stream of newness that is structured around now wholly commodified “seasons”, now that aesthetics align with capitalism; fashion, for him, being an exemplary case of newness reduced to novelty:

... It is as if the logic of fashion had, accompanying the multifarious penetration of its omnipresent images, begun to bind and identify itself with the social and psychic fabric in some ultimately inextricable way, which tends to make it over into the very logic of our system as a whole.¹⁴

He concludes that this leaves an apparent impossibility of systemic change, as all innovation seems inevitably internal to the capitalist process:

The experience and the value of perpetual change thereby comes to govern language and feelings, fully as much as the garments of this particular society, to the point at which... the supreme value of the New and of innovation, as both modernism and modernization grasped it, fades away against a steady stream of momentum and variation that at some outer limit seems stable and motionless.¹⁵

The Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s work to refresh an understanding of politics includes the proposal that we look to the realm of aesthetics – understood as it has become in Western culture as something disconnected from instrumental aims – as the site of the political. He posits: “... the sphere of gestures or pure means (that is, the sphere of those means that emancipate themselves from their relation to an end while still remaining

means)... as the proper sphere of politics”, and “Politics is the sphere of pure means, that is, of the absolute and complete gesturality of human beings.”¹⁶

A clear implication is one readily understood by those with an investment in aesthetics: that style matters, that tone and ethos are often the most important measures of the ethical and political. Agamben’s “sphere of gestures” might be usefully taken to approximate that personal aesthetic that is both the distinctive “newness” of Arps’ work – its difference and identity within the field of contemporary art – and the variations within its self-defining parameters, its internal “newness” that sustains the work as a means emancipated from a defined end.

Taking Agamben’s hypothesis to the account of Arps’ work I have so far given, there is a coincidence between his scenography and Agamben’s use of cinema as a locus of the gestural: “Cinema leads images back to the homeland of gesture. ...The duty of the director is to introduce into this dream the element of waking.”¹⁷

In these terms, the way Arps might hope to “wake” his audience is in the way he references the aesthetics of spectacularised and commercialised emotional, erotic and workplace life, for example, highlighting and de-naturalising them within his own. Even the unmatchable banality of the coat hanger in *Fractal Tears*, scrutinised by the formally activated space of the exhibition, potentially mirrors a specialised attention back into the everyday: Arps’ work challenges us to inspect our non-art experience with the sensitivity he coaxes from us in the gallery. The essence of Arps’ gesture lies in the continuity between the extensive deployment of readymade materials and the conventionally expressive gestures – indulgent, lazy, childish, un-effortful, not craft-intensive, sometimes appearing like defacements – in which a consistent tone is the *un-laboured*.

Seen in this light, Arps’ work consistently asserts an alternative kind of seriousness to that evinced by permanent materials, high production values, big budgets or labour-intensiveness. Against these standard measures of commitment, he presents the formal successes of vigour and casualness, a lack of preciousness, effects that compete with the power of the appeals of the popular work they sometimes over paint.

Gesture, then, is clearly set out for us in the hand-manipulated materials – the marks and moulding of painted and sculpted elements – but obtains also and equally in the rest of work that frames them. As gesture in Agamben’s terms, at the same time that Arps’ work is in fact a commodity and participates in fashion, it demonstrates one way in which the legacy of modernist art – and the way a practice can make newness something relative to its own, open-ended terms – can exceed reduction to product, and so a way past the conclusion that commodity capitalism has achieved cultural hegemony over any artistic counter-discourse.

III

Returning to Baudrillard's description of the postmodern, Arps' shows notably allude to and include actual pornography, from the aerobics-and-airbrush sculpted soft porn of the "Got Sex?" poster inverted and overpainted on the wall in *Gestapo Pussy Ranch*, to the more confronting, simple corrugated-cardboard-backed collage of downloaded images of people engaged in sex acts with an actor costumed and made up as the Spielberg character E.T. included in *Explaining Things*. Here most explicitly, Arps highlights human desires for some kind of connection or transcendence, and the aesthetic strangeness of mass culture's (commercial) responses to them. Here a general emotional tonality of Arps' work can be made out.

Arps' and Gwynneth Porter's text in the catalogue for *Gestapo Pussy Ranch* incorporates a collage of found texts with confessional first person accounts. It narrates a childhood experience of pornography, and an adult experience of alienated sex¹⁸ that vividly echo the detachment of the encounter with the pornographic content offered in the work. It provides us with something like the child's uncomprehending sense of something strange and powerful, a view from outside a state of arousal of the sadness of desire. The blatantly erotic, undermined in this way, contributes to a tone that has an element of the tragic. The frailty of understanding and the vulnerability of investments of value and meaning, in art and mass culture equally, are underscored. The title *Fractal Tears* connects this sense of sorrow with the popular-science sublime of fractal imagery (Col.pl. 5). The computer-aided, kitsch complexity of the "magic eye" posters that form the bases of collages in *Motivation Bunker* are also disrupted, their promised secrets un-seeable (Fig. 4).

In *Fractal Tears*, Arps uses a kitchen poster that displays a selection of cheeses in a state of glossy explicitness, a readymade still life, collaged with Google-image-search-type photographs of home crafts, at the other end of a spectrum of saleable appearances in the commercial mainstream. Literally and empirically, Frederick Kaufman argues that pornography has influenced food photography: "Like sex porn, gastroporn addresses the most basic human needs and functions, idealizing and degrading them at the same time."¹⁹

The suggestion of surveillance noted in *Gestapo Pussy Ranch* and *Explaining Things* stages a version of the ready availability of visual information, and the way that "secrets, spaces and scenes [are] abolished in a single dimension of information"; the dissolution of the private that Baudrillard, in fact, sees as productive of "obscenity".²⁰ Arps' fictions of an invaded private space further intensify this sense of the obscene, bringing the readability of all the "information" his work draws in into question.

The title *Gestapo Pussy Ranch* condenses several discernable thematics. Appropriated from the Bret Easton Ellis's novel *The Informers* (1994) – in which

Fig. 4
Dan Arps
Motivation Bunker
2008
Installation view
Neon Parc,
Melbourne



it is a title of a pornographic work overseen by one of the characters on a shelf in someone else's house – it reflects the role of the obviously transgressive signifiers of Nazism, and its associations with discipline and cruelty, in mainstream sexual fantasies of bondage and discipline. Questions of agency and responsibility, discipline and control, are bound up with the pornographic.

In Arps' titles, "motivation" and "affirmation" are concepts signed by the Californian-style self-help movement and its pop psychology. The term "dungeon" invokes sado-masochist playful discipline, a premises where one might be restrained and forcibly affirmed, by one's own arrangement. Here, at the level of emotion, we encounter a parodic reflection of how the world compels us to conform. The invitation/poster for *Affirmation Dungeon* (Gambia Castle) pictures an alien brandishing a phallus, riding on the back of a fire-breathing dragon standing on the globe, who in a speech bubble commands us to "Think positive."

Actual self-help materials used by Arps confront us again with technologies developed to profit from our basest human desires. In this world of therapy we might find the "forced extroversion of all interiority"²¹ important to Baudrillard's "obscurity", an example of a potential cause of "the depression-bummer laid on [the psyche] by the world of compulsory activities and participation."²² As the press release for *Gestapo Pussy Ranch* puts it, in shows like that one, "the tweakiness of our totally high capitalist delirium finds itself channelled with all the hyper-lucidity of the depressed".

Business culture is another theme of Arps' work. Amongst the caffeinated eclecticism – empty 1.5 litre bottles of the caffeine-heavy softdrink Mountain Dew have become a motif – a single A4 sheet of copy paper, laser printed with a diagram setting out the structure of management process, taped to the gallery wall in *Gestapo Pussy Ranch* sets out the structure of a process with boggling emptiness, in a congruently banal desktop publishing aesthetic: one step leading to another step, and an arrow returning us to the first. Alongside New Age truisms, the aesthetics of mainstream capitalism's day-to-day discipline is shown as another form of commodified knowledge.

Italian political theorist Paolo Virno deduces that "self-affirmation" becomes a necessity under current unstable conditions of work and leisure. Positing *cynicism* as a key feature of contemporary life, he emphasises that he does not mean to refer "to a cluster of psychological tendencies, but to ways of being and feeling so pervasive that they end up being common to the most diverse contexts of experience."²³ The awareness of the "conventionality and groundlessness" of rules that determines this cynicism might apply equally to participation in art, indeed artistic tradition, or wage labour. As it flickers between dry humour and the tragic, Arps' work, then, might express an exemplary cynicism. Its element of self-definition (that respect in which it is defined by its own

aesthetic) makes it in Virno's sense self-affirming, but moreover its simultaneous activation of multiple visual cultural sets of conventions or "games" (as partly enumerated above in section one) performs the "conventionality and mutability" he describes of our allegiance to any.

In *Explaining Things* a framed poster of female model posing as a golfer in short shorts, wrinkled and browned from water staining, is collaged with another found object blocking out the face of the figure, a hand drawn sketch, including the words "promotional marketing concepts" feebly rendered as an acronymic logo. In this detail, for example, once again we view something not intended for public consumption, a rough note-to-self, a draft. Arps quietly sounds another resonance of the fiction of the gallery as an abandoned private space, the sense that we may never have been intended to understand or even see these things.

On the wall in *Explaining Things*, a smudge of purple oil paint marks a print of Pacific palms. On a plinth an expressively daubed and wrapped crystal shop sculpture (an owl perching over a glass globe of the sort where electrical discharge will play its miniature lightning to the movement of your fingertip). The combination of popular art with precise but untechnical facture contrasts individual agency and objects of passive consumption. The aesthetic success of these modifications in Arps' practice's own terms, asserts fundamentally a value in individual expression. To return to Baudrillard's words, the individual subject is re-attributed with an agency, and so exceeds the role of the "a pure screen, a pure absorption and re-absorption surface of the influent networks"²⁴ to become actively responsive to the surrounding flows.

Arps' work surfaces a repressed fate for commercial products and processes – from popular art to human resources management – and in making them strange in this way, brings into question the ways they offer us of explaining or otherwise engaging with the world. His aesthetic reactivates the possibility of rejecting the pressures that a capitalist mode of production enforces, potentially unsettling our sense of the inevitability of the ways our experience is ordered, and so opening up a space for us to question the very things that might seem the most authorised, professional or sensible. In its clear-sighted cynicism about itself and the world, the work parodies yet also *makes* an individual expression, critically asserting the value of such beyond and within the frames of artistic tradition and commerce.²⁵

1. Fredric Jameson, *The Seeds of Time*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 17.
2. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson, (New York & Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), 87.
3. Department of Labour, Te Tari Mahi, New Zealand Government [accessed from <http://www.dol.govt.nz/worklife/index.asp>, 11/2008].
4. Rosalind Krauss, "The originality of the avant-garde," *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1985), 162.
5. Earlier Arps titles presented his work as a proposition or hypothesis, for example *Some drawings towards a base for the world* (2001) and *Model for a Commune* (Wellington Art Gallery, 2004).
6. C.f. the pagework "Outreach", *Natural Selection* 6, pp.2.1-2.5
7. The sense of an improvised or provisional shelter is also a distinctive feature of Australian artist Chris Hill's participatory umbrellas. Ungenerously characterised by David Levinson as "the take-me-as-I-am commune sensibility that's captured the Melbourne scene: selling itself as a harmless melee of colour and form for colour and form's sake" ("Watch the Skies," in *NZ Listener*, September 15-21, 2007, 44). Hill emphasises collectivity where Arps' scenarios (although implicitly affirming a solidarity with a predisposition sensitive to certain aesthetics) are more conventionally individualist.
8. Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer ed., trans. Bernard & Caroline Schutze, (New York: Autonomedia, 1988), 130-31.
9. John Gould Fletcher, "Vers Libre and Advertisements," *The Little Review*, vol. II, no. 2 (April 1915), reprinted in ed. Steven Matthews, *Modernism: a Sourcebook*, (Houndmills, UK, & New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), 219-20.
10. Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 21.
11. Adorno, 21.
12. Raymond Williams, "When Was Modernism?," in *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, ed. Tony Pinkney, (New York: Verso, 1989), 35.
13. Williams, 35.
14. Jameson, 17.
15. Jameson, 17.
16. Giorgio Agamben, *Means Without Ends: Notes on Politics*, trans. Vincenzo Binetti and Cesare Casarino, (Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 60.
17. Agamben, 56.
18. Dan Arps and Gwyneth Porter, "What is A Well-Dressed Teenager? by Scotty," *Sun Seeker: Gestapo Pussy Ranch Special Edition*, (Christchurch, Melbourne & Auckland: The Physics Room, Neon Parc, Michael Lett and Clouds, 2008) 5-6.
19. Frank Kaufman, "Debbie Does Salad: The Food Network at the frontiers of pornography," *Harper's Magazine*, (October 2005), 57.
20. Baudrillard, 131.
21. Baudrillard, 132.
22. Arps and Porter, 4.
23. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, trans. Isabella Bertolotti, James Cascaito and Andrea Casson, (New York & Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004).
24. Baudrillard, 27.
25. I have emphasised the way Dan Arps' work contains its own critique. Beyond this, the artist himself is an astute critic, and I am grateful for the insights he has offered me in conversation this year that have prominently shaped my argument; particularly his mentioning Broodthaers as a genealogical reference point, and sharing his curiosity about Paolo Virno's book as a commentary on the "emotional tonalities" of contemporary life.

Fig. 1
Lucio Fontana
Spatial Concept:
The End of God 1963
Oil on canvas
178 x 123 cm
Private collection
Courtesy of the Lucio
Fontana Foundation



Wastage of Effect: Newness, Expendability and Memory in 1960s Art

Anthony White

There is nothing new in our anxiety regarding the new. On the contrary, the issue has been raised many times over the last century by those who argue that modernism's obsession with change has stripped art of its traditional role of making sense of history. In order to challenge the view that the predicament faced by today's contemporary artists is unique, and to provide some historical perspective on a problem that has a long and complicated past, I will look back almost 50 years to a time when the "expendability" of the new was a topic of current concern. In the 1950s and 1960s many artists, designers and critics commented on the fact that while novel ideas, objects and artworks were appearing at breakneck speed, they were also falling into disuse and neglect at a rapidly-increasing pace. Although for some this perishability was something to celebrate; others were far more circumspect. Nigel Whiteley has already analysed the ways in which cultural expendability was theorised within English art and criticism in the 1960s.¹ Here I want to consider how this issue was addressed by artists in two other contexts, Lucio Fontana (1899–1968) in Italy and Claes Oldenburg (1929–) in the United States. Both artists were responding to the problem of the "wastage of effect," a phrase coined by the British critic Reyner Banham to describe the speed with which new aesthetic products literally and symbolically depreciated in the newly emerging "throw-away" society. The work of Fontana and Oldenburg during the 1960s can be distinguished from that of their contemporaries for its capacity to generate a corrective to the cultural amnesia produced by the modern obsession with endless renewal.

I.

Newness and expendability have been interconnected in debates about modernity and modern art for over 150 years. It is worth reviewing the history of these debates before focusing more particularly on how Fontana and Oldenburg dealt with this issue in the 1960s. One of the goals of newness in nineteenth-century modern art and literature had been to dispense with an institutionalised, historical past which was felt to limit creativity with its weight of rules, authority and academic regulation. In his attack on the established certainties of intellectual and social life, for example, Arthur Rimbaud aggressively jettisoned the past in 1873 by declaring that he had no antecedents whatsoever and stressed that “it is necessary to be absolutely modern.”² Twinned with this concern to be unprecedented was an interest among certain writers in the fleeting rather than the enduring. In his 1863 essay “The Painter of Modern Life” on the artist Constantin Guys, Charles Baudelaire explicitly connected modernity to “the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent.”³ Through depicting and responding to the passing quality of newness in modernity, Baudelaire’s ideal modern artist combated the academic obsession with the past as ultimate authority and also resisted the levelling effects of commodification. As Walter Benjamin explained, in Baudelaire’s work newness “represents that absolute which is no longer accessible to any interpretation or comparison. It becomes the ultimate entrenchment of art.” The French poet saw the “inestimable value of novelty” as an antidote to the degradation suffered by those things which, as commodities, have a price on their head.⁴

Two observations should be made about Baudelaire’s valorisation of the fleeting quality of the new. First, Baudelaire didn’t see transitoriness as a value in and of itself, but rather something ideally mixed with “the eternal and immutable.”⁵ In some writings the poet was critical of newness, tying it not to liveliness but to death. In his commentary on the Universal Exposition of 1855, for example, Baudelaire posed the question whether “indefinite progress... would not turn out to be a perpetually renewed form of suicide.”⁶ The second observation to be made about Baudelaire’s writing on this topic is that newness, as Benjamin pointed out, is both “art’s last line of resistance” and “the commodity’s most advanced line of attack.”⁷ Modern art’s obsession with newness and ephemerality was not something which inherently opposed the world of commerce but rather was shared by and had its origins in commodity culture.

The interweaving of newness, ephemerality and commodities in modern art was intensified during the twentieth century. In 1909 the Italian Futurist Marinetti called for the literal destruction of libraries and museums and an art that would heedlessly pursue the ever-changing spectacle of modernity. In the first Futurist manifesto of 1909, Marinetti’s polemic regarding newness led him to welcome the day when Futurism would be replaced by a succeeding generation of writers and poets: “When we are forty, other younger and stronger men will probably throw us in the wastebasket like useless manuscripts – we want it to happen.”⁸

In spite of the rhetoric, the Futurists were not into self-destruction. On the contrary, as Marinetti and Sant' Elia explained in 1914,

the fundamental characteristics of Futurist architecture will be its impermanence and transience. Things will endure less than us. Every generation must build its own city. This constant renewal of the architectonic environment will contribute to the victory of Futurism.⁹

The Futurists, who avowed an art of incessant innovation, only proposed a world in which continual obsolescence and renewal were the norm so that they could more effectively dominate the market.¹⁰

From the 1930s onwards ephemerality would move out of the realm of avant-garde theory into commercial practice when it became an explicit principle of product design in America.¹¹ As Nigel Whiteley has shown, this became particularly noticeable during the 1950s in the automobile industry, when superficial changes were introduced annually to the appearance of cars to encourage owners to exchange their current vehicle for a new one, a phenomenon which began to affect the individual's relationship to objects at all levels of culture.¹² Although many were scathing about this aspect of modern product design, in his 1955 article "Industrial Design and Popular Art" the English critic Reyner Banham actively campaigned for basing all modern industrial design on the principles of a "throw-away economy" such as that encountered in the American car industry. He described contemporary culture as one "in which the most fundamental classification of our ideas and worldly possessions is in terms of their relative expendability."¹³ In support of his argument he cited the French modernist architect Le Corbusier:

It is clearly absurd to demand that objects designed for a short useful life should exhibit qualities signifying eternal validity – such qualities as divine proportion, pure form or harmony of colours. In fairness to Le Corbusier, it should be remembered that he was the first to raise the problem of permanence and expendability in engineering: "Ephemeral beauty so quickly becomes ridiculous. The smoking steam engine that spurred Huysmann to spontaneous lyricism is now only rust among locomotives; the automobile of next year's show will be the death of the Citroën body that arouses such excitement today."¹⁴

The salutary aspect of "expendability" was that it worked against idealist notions of eternal truth and unchanging forms. However, the combination of a greater emphasis on the visual appearance of commodities in this period and the increasingly rapid transformation of that appearance over time are the hallmarks of what has come to be called "the spectacle." One of the chief features of this advanced condition of industrial capitalism, as Jonathan Crary has pointed out, is the destruction of the past and the reign of an eternal

present: "History... had always been the measure by which novelty was assessed, but whoever is in the business of selling novelty has an interest in destroying the means by which it could be judged."¹⁵ A passion for novelty which renders objects, styles and ideas outmoded almost the moment they are born prevents a real awareness of the present as it bars individuals from making a proper assessment of the new through meaningful comparisons with what has gone before. By the late 1950s, the "throw-away economy" became a pervasive fact not only for household items and cars, but also for products of high culture such as painting and sculpture. Banham had predicted this when he argued in 1955 that "esthetic qualities are themselves expendable" in the sense that the significance of new works of fine art are liable to become "debased, distorted or rendered meaningless" over time, a phenomenon he described as "wastage of effect."¹⁶ With this term Banham drew attention to the inevitable aesthetic obsolescence of all art forms in a context where reception is determined by a commodity culture which dictates ever-increasing levels of novelty.

Although several artists and critics in the late 1950s and early 1960s were aware of the difficulties presented for art by this seemingly inevitable cycle of newness and expendability, very few artists were able to address such questions directly in their work. Among the few exceptions to this general rule were two artists working on either side of the Atlantic, Lucio Fontana and Claes Oldenburg. Rather than avoiding newness, expendability or the commodity, they combined all three in a group of works produced in the first half of the 1960s which resisted the amnesiac tendencies associated with the perishability of the new. One path toward understanding their response to this problem lies in an observation about newness made by the literary historian Merrill Cole. In his defence of the work of Arthur Rimbaud, Cole points out that there are two types of newness. One type, associated most closely with the commodity system, "consolidates the ego's petty securities and its sense that the world is as it should be."¹⁷ Another type of newness, that associated with certain forms of modernism, achieves two things: it "shatters the rigidities and complacencies of the ego" and holds out the "painful promise of what the world and the self could become."¹⁸ Fontana and Oldenburg employed the latter two strategies while privileging the role of memory in an art that aimed to promote a meaningful relationship between present and past.

II.

The contemporary art world on both sides of the Atlantic during the 1950s was dominated by the rise of Abstract Expressionism, the movement known in Europe as Informal art. The meteoric rise and then precipitous fall of this phenomenon is the essential background to the reading of Fontana's work in the early 1960s which I undertake below. The work of artists such as Jackson Pollock and Franz Kline in the United States, and Georges Mathieu and Hans Hartung in Europe, to name only a few, avoided the planning and organisation of more conventional compositions and emphasised the artist's direct bodily

gesture on the canvas. Such painting was viewed as a radical departure from the art of the past motivated by a flight from modern industrial society. As the American art historian Meyer Schapiro argued in 1957, "The pathos of the reduction or fragility of the self within a culture that becomes increasingly organized through industry, economy and the state intensifies the desire of the artist to create forms that will manifest his liberty." In his view this led contemporary painters to emphasise the material substance of their craft and the spontaneous bodily mark, what Schapiro called the "devices of handling, processing, surfacing, which confer to the utmost degree the aspect of the freely made."¹⁹ One of the exemplars of this tendency was the French painter Georges Mathieu. In his 1960 text, "From the Abstract to the Possible," Mathieu argued that rapid execution was essential: "Speed... means the final abandonment of the methods of craftsmanship in painting in favour of purely creative methods." What Mathieu sought was a profound dis-remembering of the techniques of traditional art in favour of totally new methods, and an absence of pre-meditation in creating the work to the point where even the painting process itself was without history. Fast execution and lack of forethought were intended to give rise to the kinds of improvisation and embodied spontaneity which enabled the artist to compare his painting with other "liberated and direct" arts such as Jazz and calligraphy.²⁰

In spite of these claims neither Mathieu nor most of the Informal and Abstract Expressionist painters had really abandoned the art of the past. Thirty years earlier the Surrealist André Masson had created automatic drawings in which he proposed the free creation of untutored marks motivated by the subconscious as a means of removing the special prestige attached to skilled art making. Mathieu, who repeated Masson's automatic drawings as series of theatrically enacted gestures, made the author into a transcendent referent of the work. In other words, he was repeating strategies of the historical avant-garde and reinforcing rather than critiquing the most traditional aspects of painting.²¹ In this sense, if Abstract Expressionism and Informal art can be described as modern, this modernity has to be understood dialectically: as the repetition of sameness. As Benjamin had written, "The 'modern,' the time of hell... What is at issue is... that precisely in that which is newest the face of the world never alters, that this newest remains, in every respect, the same."²² Mathieu's supposed attack on traditional painting produced nothing new and reinforced age-old, mythical aspects of art.

Furthermore, by the late 1950s and early 1960s the embodied spontaneity and liberty of Abstract Expressionist and Informal art was coming seriously under question on both sides of the Atlantic. By the early 1960s, for example, it was clear to many New York commentators that "abstract expressionism seemed to have run its course."²³ The problem had been identified as early as 1957 when the French critic Edouard Jaguer argued that such art had surpassed neither Surrealism nor pre-war abstraction:

today we are witnessing... an assault of repeatedly identical modes, which are nothing more than “mechanical liberations,” the shock value of which is ultimately obscured. The gesture, having lost every quality of direct, emotional testimony becomes more and more simple reflexes... these stains and scribbles have become nothing but formal tics, the happy externalization of a new intellectual comfort.²⁴

Thus, the gestural painting movement, which had sought a new artistic language to lend freedom and bodily immediacy to artistic creation and thereby defeat the world of industry and administration, had fallen prey to what Banham described as the “wastage of effect”; it had quickly degenerated into a machine-like, empty, and moribund form.

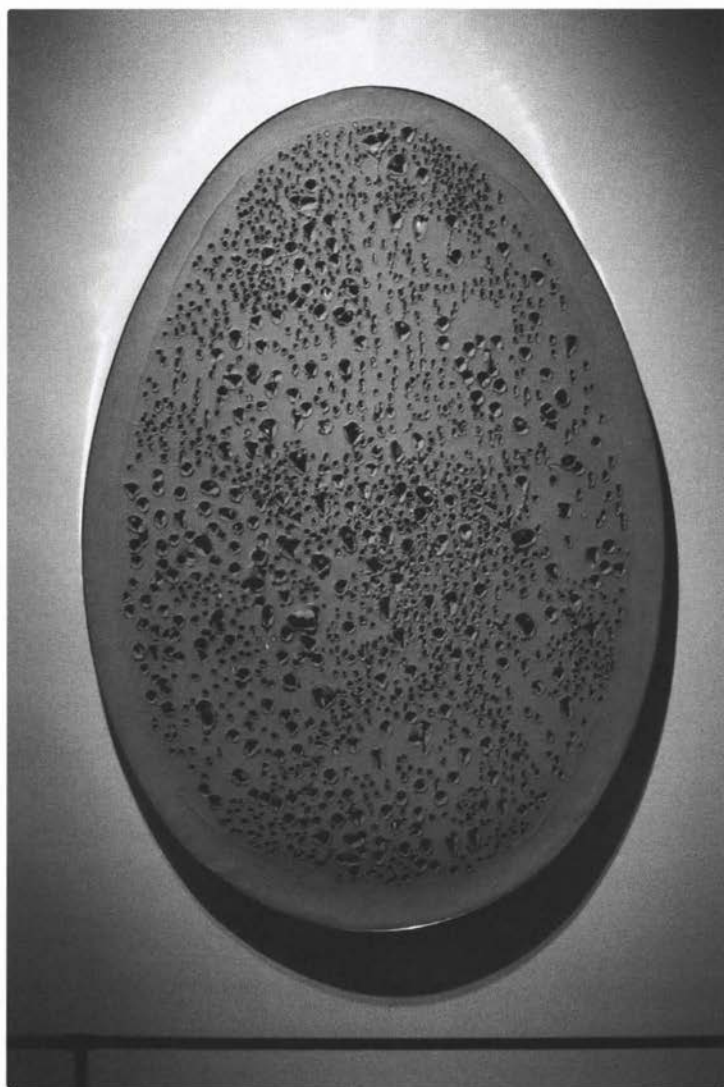
The rapid erosion of gestural painting and its collapse into the very industrial realm it had sought to oppose brought the question of the expendability of modern artistic styles sharply into the foreground. In formulating his theory of expendability, Banham had borrowed the concept of *consumo* developed by the contemporary Italian aestheticians Enzo Paci and Gillo Dorfles. Related to the idea of entropy, *consumo* articulated the temporal nature of all cultural forms, subject as they are to the endless change and renewal of historical process.²⁵ Although Paci and Dorfles promoted the positive aspects of this condition, others commentators in Italy argued that the ever decreasing life-cycle of artistic forms meant that there was less and less opportunity for a proper reckoning with the present and the past. As the Italian critic Emilio Garroni argued in his criticism of European Informal painting in a 1962 article “Informal Art and the Semantic Crisis of the Arts”:

We don't want to argue that the obsolescence of cultural products should lead us to an illusory restoration... We would say only that... non-permanence is the symptom of a fragile society, one deprived of cultural instruments adapted to self-definition and self-testimony.²⁶

In the 1950s the seemingly unprecedented capacity for self-expression permitted by gestural painting, with its emphasis on the spontaneous acts of a human body liberated from historical and intellectual constraints, had quickly perished and died away. The Milan-based artist Lucio Fontana would make this very same entropic perishability of the body into the subject of his painting during the 1960s.

Fontana's punctured and cut canvases of the 1950s and 1960s have often been discussed in the literature as relating to the human body. Most readings have seen the paintings as a kind of “action-based art” situated somewhere between abstract painting and performance.²⁷ Although the holes in the surfaces of these paintings certainly demonstrate that the artist had some kind of physical impact on the canvas, in interviews Fontana insisted that he was completely

Fig. 2
Lucio Fontana
Spatial Concept:
The End of God 1964
Oil on canvas
178 x 123 cm
Private collection
Courtesy of the Lucia
Fontana Foundation



opposed to any interpretation of these works which put emphasis upon the artist's gesture.²⁸ As proof of this, in many cases the punctures and cuts have a mechanical appearance far removed from gestural art's expressiveness, and the hole or cut in the canvas is a literal lack which absents the figure of the artist from the work. Another reading of these paintings which has focused on the human body, taking into account Fontana's interest in space travel during this period, has shifted emphasis away from the artist's body to focus on the body of those who undertake journeys beyond the earth's atmosphere. In this interpretation, put forward in Sarah Whitfield's catalogue essay for the 1999 Hayward Gallery retrospective of Fontana's work, the punctured and cut paintings speak to the physical pain experienced by the astronaut faced with "the terrors of space."²⁹ Another interpretation may be put forward, based on a reading of the series of paintings titled *The End of God* (1963 – 64), which focuses not on the body of the artist, nor that of the astronaut, but on the viewer's experience of their own physical body under the post-war conditions of cultural expendability.

The End of God is a series of 38 works painted on ovoid canvases of identical dimensions, all 178 centimeters high (Figs. 1 and 2). Each canvas was covered in a uniform coat of stridently-colored paint and then studded with punctures and gashes of varying dimensions. The height of these works closely matches that of the average viewer who stands before the work, and the fat-bottomed, ovoid shape of each canvas mimics the gravity-pulled destination of all flesh. As a result, the paintings' format not only suggests the organic but also mirrors the viewer's heavy physicality. Working against this reading, however, is the fact that the ovoid format of the works was a shape that had been recently appropriated by contemporary designers, as egg-shaped chairs and household items became the stock-in-trade of European industrial design houses in this period.³⁰ As Penny Sparke argues, while much post-war industrial design had been inspired by the biomorphic sensuousness of work by Henry Moore and Alexander Calder – which often included egg-shaped forms as a sculptural motif – by the 1960s this appeal to organic corporeality in design had become increasingly attenuated as designers moved away from satisfying practical needs and focused on "status symbolism and stylishness":

This visual formalism represented an idea of "international chic" which became increasingly synonymous with the materialistic lifestyle desired by affluent, style-conscious consumers in metropolitan centers all over the world, not just in Italy. Between 1955 and 1965, Italy created a highly persuasive neo-Modern aesthetic of consumption.³¹

Similarly, the synthetic pigments that Fontana chose, including emerald green, canary yellow and hot pink, were part of a range of newly-available, strident colours strongly associated with the commodity realms of contemporary fashion and design. As one contemporary critic pointed out, the artist

chose the same shocking pink that the actress Jayne Mansfield used to decorate her home, a colour which was “indicative of the complete banality of Hollywood taste.”³² To the degree that Fontana’s candy-coloured, egg-shaped paintings connote the human body, therefore, it is not the everyday experience of the natural or organic body, but rather the body as marketed and perpetually renewed in the rapidly changing fashion cycle of the industrially designed commodity. As Lawrence Alloway argued, in Fontana’s work “the *chic* is itself made lyrical and problematic.”³³ The artist showed how the art object’s potential to address the individual’s organic embodiment had been reduced to a concern with the social status conferred by the latest and most glamorous *objet de luxe*.

In describing his choice of strident colours, Fontana for his part argued in 1962 that he wanted to evoke the “uneasiness of contemporary man” who is “dismayed by the inventions that follow one after the other” and is overwhelmed by “the speed of life.”³⁴ Although Fontana was arguing that the discomfort one experiences before his paintings is related to the disorientation caused by rapidly changing pace of contemporary society, it was also connected to a sense that the human body itself becomes expendable when it is subject to the endlessly updated fantasies of the commodity’s fashion cycle. Because if anything suggests uneasiness in these pictures, it is the gaping holes that the artist tore into his canvases. Through these punctures, with their juicy, dripping aureoles of cloggy pigment that blast the egg-shape with a hideous pox of open ruptures, Fontana shockingly negates the perfect form evoked by the designer ovoid shape and reflects back to the viewer a body that is broken and hollow. In this way, Fontana sent out a warning: just like the body of last year’s Citroën, or the embodied painterly gesture in informal painting, the wondrous images of bodily perfection presented by the pseudo-organic forms of the post-war design industry were mortified in advance by the allure of next season’s model and would inevitably end up on the trash heap.

Fontana was memorialising in this way a long-forgotten allegorical mode of seventeenth-century Dutch art on the theme of *vanitas*, paintings which feature emblems of earthly life, such as treasured objects, worldly pursuits, food and wine with reminders of the ephemerality of material pleasure. As the passages from Ecclesiastes would have it, there is nothing new under the sun, and no matter how fabulous one’s latest possessions or one’s idea of oneself, all returns to dust.³⁵ A common feature of works in the *vanitas* genre are over-ripe fruit which refer to the inevitable transience of that which is living, and bleached, hollow skulls with gaping holes that stare out at the viewer.³⁶ Similarly, in Fontana’s perforated eggs, the individual bolstered by the artificial importance of new status objects was shown to be literally expendable. In a critical analogue of the perished bodies of the gestural art producers of the 1950s, here the consumer’s body image was shown to be an empty form of vanity that had its ghastly underside of death.

III.

Like Fontana, Claes Oldenburg's work also responded to the expendability of the new. Although from 1961 he dealt directly with the realm of the commodity, in his earlier work he engaged in a flight from that realm. In the years directly after World War II many felt that traditional forms of modern painting and sculpture had lost their legitimacy. One response to this situation was the primitivism of Jean Dubuffet, who made a virtue of the inelegant and vulgar, and whose paintings of the 1940s emulated rudimentary daubs on toilet walls. What the latter works lacked in traditional beauty was felt to have been compensated for by association with the authentic culture of those excluded from society. Oldenburg, who, like Dubuffet, sought to "restore the excitement and meaning of simple experience," also engaged with the dejecta of society.³⁷ As Joshua Shannon has shown in a recent article, Oldenburg's rubbishy installation and performances titled *The Street* (1960) were a response to the contemporary urban development of New York City, wherein new and relatively impersonal modern buildings and street grids were beginning to transform entire neighbourhoods and replace older historical architecture.³⁸ In contrast to the spatial abstraction and glittering newness of the modernist urban planning underway outside the gallery, *The Street* exemplified disorder and decay. Moreover, as trash lacks value and has outlived its usefulness, it cannot be readily appropriated or recycled by society for any purpose. It therefore seemed ideal for creating an object that, in Oldenburg's words "transcended its use as a commercial counter," and defeated the enervating process of commodification.³⁹

Oldenburg soon realised, however, that there was a system whereby such works, no matter how new or shocking, could be accepted into the system of capitalist exchange. Although the happenings which accompanied the exhibition of *The Street* were an innovative blending of the visual and performing arts that dramatically challenged traditional aesthetic categories, they soon became a form of middle-class entertainment. As Oldenburg would later observe, "by 1962, the whole thing had become totally commercial... People were arriving in Cadillacs."⁴⁰ The fact that visitors with fancy cars were attending his shows was a sign of his failure to remain oppositional. Oldenburg analysed the situation in a note written in 1961: "The bourgeois scheme is that they wish to be disturbed from time to time, they like that, but then they envelop you, and that little bit is over, and they are ready for the next."⁴¹ The radicality of the artist's work was regularly absorbed by middle-class and commercial culture so that its challenge to settled values could be extinguished. Oldenburg sought to resolve this dilemma by engaging directly with the realm of commodities in his next work, *The Store* (1961).

The Store was an installation in a disused store-front on the Lower East Side of New York City (Fig. 3). Visitors to the shop were invited to purchase a series of plaster and muslin objects painted in brightly-coloured enamel paint which formed replicas of merchandise such as food and garments. In the rough

Fig 3.
Claes Oldenburg
in *The Store*
107 East 2nd Street,
New York, 1961
Photo: Robert McElroy



Fig. 4
Claes Oldenburg
Pastry Case I 1961–62
Burlap and muslin soaked
in plaster, painted with
enamel, in glass-and-metal
case
52.7 x 76.5 x 37.3 cm
The Museum of Modern
Art, New York, The Sidney
and Harriet Janis
Collection, 1967
Courtesy the Oldenburg
van Bruggen Foundation
© 2009 Claes Oldenburg



modelling and slapdash paint technique of these works Oldenburg paid a twisted homage to the earlier generation of Abstract Expressionist painters, even though his interest in the world of merchandise display certainly differentiates Oldenburg's work from that recently expired gestural painting movement. In *Ice Cream Cone and Heel*, for example, the glossy enamel paint that has been applied to the ice cream representing chocolate sauce has been poured unevenly, allowing it to dribble down over the cone in an "intentionally sloppy" manner, similar to the work of De Kooning or Jackson Pollock.⁴² Moreover, in the case of his depictions of edible items, by wilfully savouring the way food is presented in shop displays and advertisements – its glossy texture, its fluidity – Oldenburg had emphasised the visceral quality of his work by evoking the bodily processes of ingestion and digestion. In 1965 Mario Amaya, who compared Oldenburg's works with experiences of "childhood or fun-fair eating," argued that the works "bring to the subconscious salivary memories of the past."⁴³ In making this comment, Amaya highlighted the fact that Oldenburg, like the gestural painters who preceded him, was concerned with the somatic dimension of the human body. He also drew attention the fact that Oldenburg was not depicting up-to-date merchandise but rather commodities from an earlier historical period belonging to the childhood experience of the viewer (Fig. 4).

References to the past were made in other reviewer's comments on this work. In 1962 Sidney Tillim considered Oldenburg's work alongside that of three other artists, namely Robert Indiana, Jasper Johns and Allan Kaprow, who he called the "New American Dreamers".⁴⁴ In Tillim's view these artists' positive valuation of North American culture was rooted in nostalgia for a vision of the nation's ideal polity. He saw this incarnated in Kaprow's happenings, which he called "expressions of a longing for a childlike sense of participation in a total social experience – which is merely a corollary of the innocence projected by the very phrase 'The American Dream.'"⁴⁵ When Tillim focused on Oldenburg's *The Store*, he again drew attention to a mood of "longing":

if its aggravated humor finally settled within an aura of faint melancholy – possibly my own – it was because it was all so hopelessly nostalgic. For each item and finally *The Store* itself embodied a special emotion, one which had compared the way things were (have Mary Janes gone up?) with the way things are, and found the latter a possibly appalling inevitability.⁴⁶

Viewing *The Store* as evoking one of the founding myths of American society, Tillim identifies Oldenburg's appeal to an innocent fantasy of capitalism in which an aesthetic abundance, a fullness of experience – similar to that of a child let loose in the "five and dime" store – is promised to all. The gaudy colours and glistening surfaces of Oldenburg's painted plaster merchandise look back onto a past of the commodity when the fulfilment and participation embodied in "The American Dream" was a still a living possibility. However, the suggestions of degradation and decay in the ragged modelling and running

or dribbling paint bring about an awareness that the promise of yesteryear's goods was never delivered, and, by extension, that any shiny new commodities will also fail to satisfy and are destined to become the useless garbage of tomorrow. In this sense the critic Jack Kroll was right when he argued that *The Store* brings us face to face with our "lost and slightly smelly innocence."⁴⁷

When Oldenburg insisted that "the store title is in fact a play on words... the store means for me: my consciousness," he meant that *The Store* was a storehouse or repository of the artist's own childhood fantasies of commodities from the 1940s.⁴⁸ Those years were a period of what the artist called "very nicely designed toasters and typewriters and so on – and there was a great emphasis on commercial object culture. And the point was, as children, we liked it. We really liked it."⁴⁹ As he further explained, however, "The aim of putting the store in an actual neighbourhood is to contrast it to the actual object."⁵⁰ The works inside *The Store* focused the viewer's mind on the fact that the apparent charm of any new range of commodities offered for sale in the Lower East Side of New York, or anywhere else for that matter, was a highly temporary affair. Oldenburg tackled the expendability of his own art through commodification by provoking reflection upon the perishable nature of the commodity form *per se*.

IV.

In many ways James Meyer was right to argue, in the roundtable published in 2008 by *Artforum* on art and its markets, that "The history of modernism is in part a history of the marketing of the new."⁵¹ From Baudelaire's advocacy of Constantin Guys as "The Painter of Modern Life," to the Futurist's self-promotional rhetoric, to the contemporary context in which artists such as Damien Hirst have made their own strategies for career advancement and economic success the subject of their art, we have seen an intensification of the relationship between art, the commodity and newness. Moreover, as Patrick McCaughey recently observed, we live at a time when "present-day art, the new-new thing" is "heavily valued and privileged over the past."⁵² This has led to an ever more rapid discarding of what was new only yesterday and the clamour for anything that represents a change in comparison to the past, to the point where change is desired for change's sake. The position reached by the contemporary artist has been described by Frederic Jameson as follows:

What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation.⁵³

From this analysis we might conclude that innovation in art is always doomed to be a mere affirmation of the status quo. However, it need not always be so,

and two artists working in the early 1960s were in a position to expose the problem of the expendability of the new to analysis.

Oldenburg and Fontana stand out from their contemporaries and can be linked in spite of the fact that they emerged from very different backgrounds into quite disparate contexts on opposite sides of the Atlantic, because of the uncommon meeting of newness and historicity in their work. After the rapid demise of Abstract Expressionism and Informal painting during the 1950s it was all too clear that what Banham described as the “wastage of effect” was in full swing: even the most spontaneously created and vibrantly new art forms tend to entropically lose their currency. The meeting of novel forms and old memories in Fontana’s and Oldenburg’s work was a critical response to this condition. Fontana revealed the perishability of the new insofar as his ovoid paintings of the 1960s reflected back to the viewer an image of their own body as simultaneously bolstered by new consumer fantasies of corporeal perfection and lacerated by the inevitable death such fantasies entail. He showed how the new is, in a certain sense, already old, even dead: Fontana’s works, by memorialising the traditional genre of the vanity picture, shatter the “complacencies of the ego” artificially inflated by an ever-changing ideal buoyed by the commodity culture.⁵⁴ Oldenburg, by contrast, attempted to counter the cycle of newness in capitalist society whereby innovative visual practices are swallowed up and stripped of their power. He did this by turning his attention to the commodity itself and asking the question whether the memory of the satisfaction continually guaranteed, yet denied, by the market, of that “painful promise of what the world and the self could become,” shouldn’t be restored to sight.⁵⁵

Beyond their worth as a form of historical evidence that artists are able to challenge the apparently irresistible forces of commodification and heedless novelty, the examples of Oldenburg and Fontana show that practicing artists who are today faced with the apparent inevitability of newness in art have alternatives to work with. The work of these artists demonstrates that artistic innovation can take place without sacrificing historical understanding, the latter being a type of knowledge essential to any meaningful insight into the nature of contemporaneity, and without which art collapses into marketing and obeys the hollow corporate doctrine of “moving forward.”

1. See Nigel Whiteley, “Toward a Throw-Away Culture. Consumerism, ‘Style Obsolescence’ and Cultural Theory in the 1950s and 1960s,” *Oxford Art Journal* 10, no. 2 (1987), 3–27; and Nigel Whiteley, *Reyner Banham: Historian of the Immediate Future* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002).
2. Arthur Rimbaud, *Collected Poems*, trans. Martin Sorrell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 213, 253.
3. Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863), in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays* (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 12.
4. Walter Benjamin, “Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century” (1939), in *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 22.
5. Baudelaire, 12.
6. Charles Baudelaire, “The Universal Exhibition of 1855: the Fine Arts,” in *Baudelaire: Selected Writings on Art and Artists*, trans. P. E. Charvet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 122.
7. Benjamin, 22.
8. F. T. Marinetti, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” (1909), in *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. Umbro Apollonio (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 23.
9. F. T. Marinetti and Antonio Sant’Elia, “Manifesto of

- Futurist Architecture," in Apollonio, 172.
10. See Claudia Salaris, "Marketing Modernism: Marinetti as Publisher," *Modernism/Modernity* 1, no. 3 (1994), 110: "Marinetti possessed... gifts that he utilized in a self-conscious effort to promote Futurism in much the way that one would promote an industrial product that is to be introduced into the market and publicized."
 11. As Whitely argues, in the 1930s the design fraternity began to lend a fashionable or stylish appearance to a product such as the household refrigerator, thereby "virtually guaranteeing it would look old fashioned in two or three years time, and so was building-in style obsolescence." Whiteley, 1987, 3.
 12. Whiteley, 7. It was during this period, for example, that Europeans ceased the age-old practice of handing objects and utensils down from one generation to the next and began to regularly replace old things with new ones. Vittorio Gregotti, "Italian Design: 1945–1971," in *Italy: The New Domestic Landscape. Achievements and Problems of Italian Design*, exh. cat., The Museum of Modern Art, New York (Florence: Centro Di, 1972), 322.
 13. Reyner Banham, "A Throw-Away Aesthetic (1955)," *Industrial Design* 7, no. 3 (1960): 63.
 14. Banham, 63.
 15. Jonathan Crary, "Spectacle, Attention, Counter-Memory (1988)," in *October: The Second Decade, 1986–1996*, ed. Rosalind Krauss, et al. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 424.
 16. Banham, 64.
 17. Merrill Cole, *The Other Orpheus: A Poetics of Modern Homosexuality* (London: Routledge, 2003), 77.
 18. Cole, 77–78.
 19. Meyer Schapiro, "Recent Abstract Painting (The Liberating Quality of Avant-Garde Art, 1957)," in *Modern Art: 19th and 20th Centuries, Selected Papers* (New York: George Braziller, 1978), 222, 218.
 20. Georges Mathieu, *From the Abstract to the Possible: Painters Towards an Elucidation of Western Art* (Paris: Editions du Cercle d'Arte Contemporain, 1960), 20.
 21. On post-war art and repetition, see Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "The Primary Colors for the Second Time: A Paradigm Repetition of the Neo-Avant-Garde," *October* 37 (1986): 50–51.
 22. Benjamin, 544.
 23. Alan Solomon, "The New Art," *Art International* 7, no. 7 (1963), 37.
 24. Edouard Jaguer, "Così come vi furono un tempo dei poeti maledetti..." *Il gesto* 2 (1957), n.p.
 25. See Enzo Paci, "Esperienza conoscenza storica e filosofia," *Aut Aut: rivista di filosofia e di cultura* 27 (1955): 204; and Gillo Dorfles, "Communication and Symbol in the Work of Art," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 15, no. 3 (1957), 290, 296–97.
 26. Emilio Garroni, "L'informale e la crisi semantica delle arti," in *Alternative Attuali/Omaggio a Burri* (Rome: Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1962), 82.
 27. Paul Schimmel, *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949–1979*, exh. cat., (Los Angeles: The Museum of Contemporary Art, 1998), 18.
 28. "I am not informal," Fontana once declared, "the informal seeks the result in the gesture ... my nature is attracted rather to space." Quoted in Marco Valsecchi, "L'uomo ora è nello spazio d'arte viaggia con lui," *Tempo*, Milan, May 9, 1964.
 29. Sarah Whitfield, *Lucio Fontana*, exh. cat., (London: Hayward Gallery, 1999), 44, 46.
 30. See, for example, Arne Jacobsen, "Egg" Chair, 1958. Reproduced in Luciano Rubino, *Arne Jacobsen: Opera completa 1909/1971*, (Rome: Edizioni Kappa, 1980), 69, fig. 114.
 31. Penny Sparke, "A Home for Everybody?: Design, Ideology and the Culture of the Home in Italy, 1945–1972," in *Modernism in Design*, ed. Paul Greenhalgh (London: Reaktion, 1990), 190–91; Penny Sparke, *Italian Design: 1870 to the Present*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 126. See also Lesley Jackson, *The New Look: Design in the Fifties*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 44: "Whilst the early organic designs were created in a meaningful attempt to achieve organic unity, later commercial exploitation resulted in a nonsense of superficial styling."
 32. L. P. Finizio, "Le mostre: Lucio Fontana," *Il pensiero nazionale*, May 15, 1964.
 33. Lawrence Alloway, "Man on the Border," in *Lucio Fontana: Ten Paintings of Venice*, exh. cat., (New York: Martha Jackson Gallery, 1961). Fontana's egg-shape canvases also echo Piero Manzoni's use of real eggs in the early 1960s, particularly the latter's "Consumption of dynamic art by the art-devouring public" in which visitors to Manzoni's exhibition were invited to eat eggs upon which the artist had stamped his own thumbprint.
 34. Grazia Livi, "Incontro con Lucio Fontana," *Vanità*, Autumn 1962, 52.
 35. *New American Standard Bible* (La Habra: The Lockman Foundation, 1973), 482–88.
 36. Carolyn Korsmeyer, *Making Sense of Taste: Food and Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002), 162.
 37. Claes Oldenburg, quoted in *Claes Oldenburg, an Anthology* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 1995), 42.
 38. Joshua Shannon, "Claes Oldenburg's The Street and Urban Renewal in Greenwich Village, 1960," *Art Bulletin*, LXXVI, no. 1 (2004), 157.
 39. Susan Hapgood, *Neo-Dada: Redefining Art, 1958–62* (New York: American Federation of Arts in association with Universe Publishing, 1994), 126.
 40. Calvin Tomkins, *Off the Wall: Robert Rauschenberg and the Art World of our Time* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), 154.
 41. Oldenburg, 1995, 102.
 42. Sonya Rudikoff, "New York Letter," *Art International* 6, no. 9 (1962), 62.
 43. Mario Amaya, *Pop Art... and After* (New York: Viking Press, 1972), 92.
 44. Sidney Tillim, "Month in Review," *Arts Magazine* 36, no. 5 (1962), 34.
 45. Tillim, 35.
 46. Tillim, 36. "Mary Janes" are an old-fashioned, peanut butter candy produced by the New England Confectionary Company in the USA.
 47. J[ack] K[roll], "Situations and Environments," *Art News* 60, no. 2 (1961), 16.
 48. Oldenburg, 1995, 130.
 49. Claes Oldenburg, quoted in Andrew Graham-Dixon, "Art in the Promised Land," *The Independent Magazine*, September 7, 1991, 32, and cited in Thomas Crow, "The Children's Hour," *Artforum* 30, no. 4 (1991), 86.
 50. Oldenburg, 130.
 51. Meyer et al., 293.
 52. Patrick McCaughey, "When Greed Goes Bad," *The Age*, November 29, 2009, A2, 18.
 53. Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), 4–5. Quoted in Cole, 71.
 54. Cole, 77.
 55. Cole, 78.

136.137.138 ARCHIVE

Documentation through drawing:

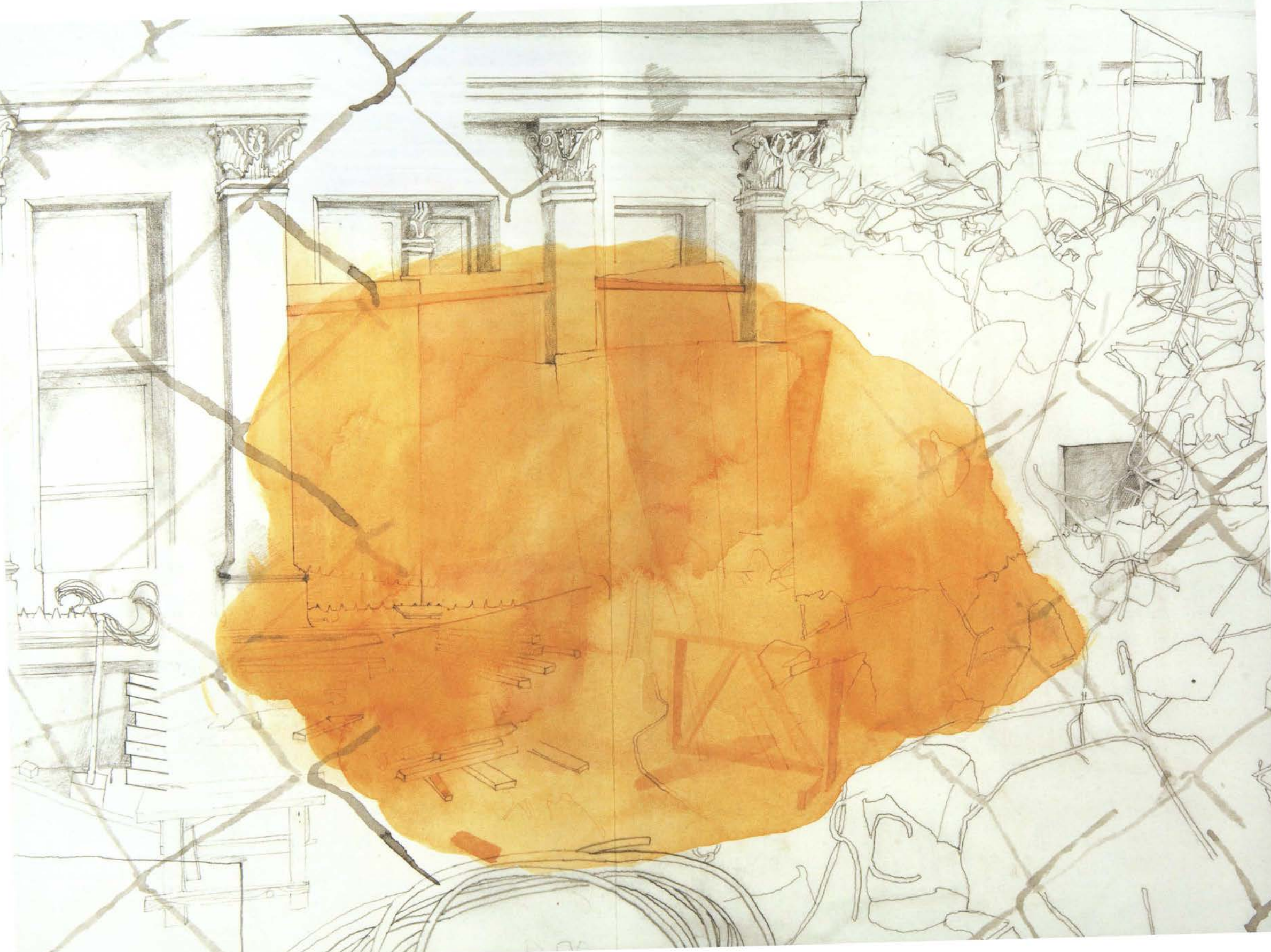
Demolition at the Auckland Art Gallery

Fiona Connor

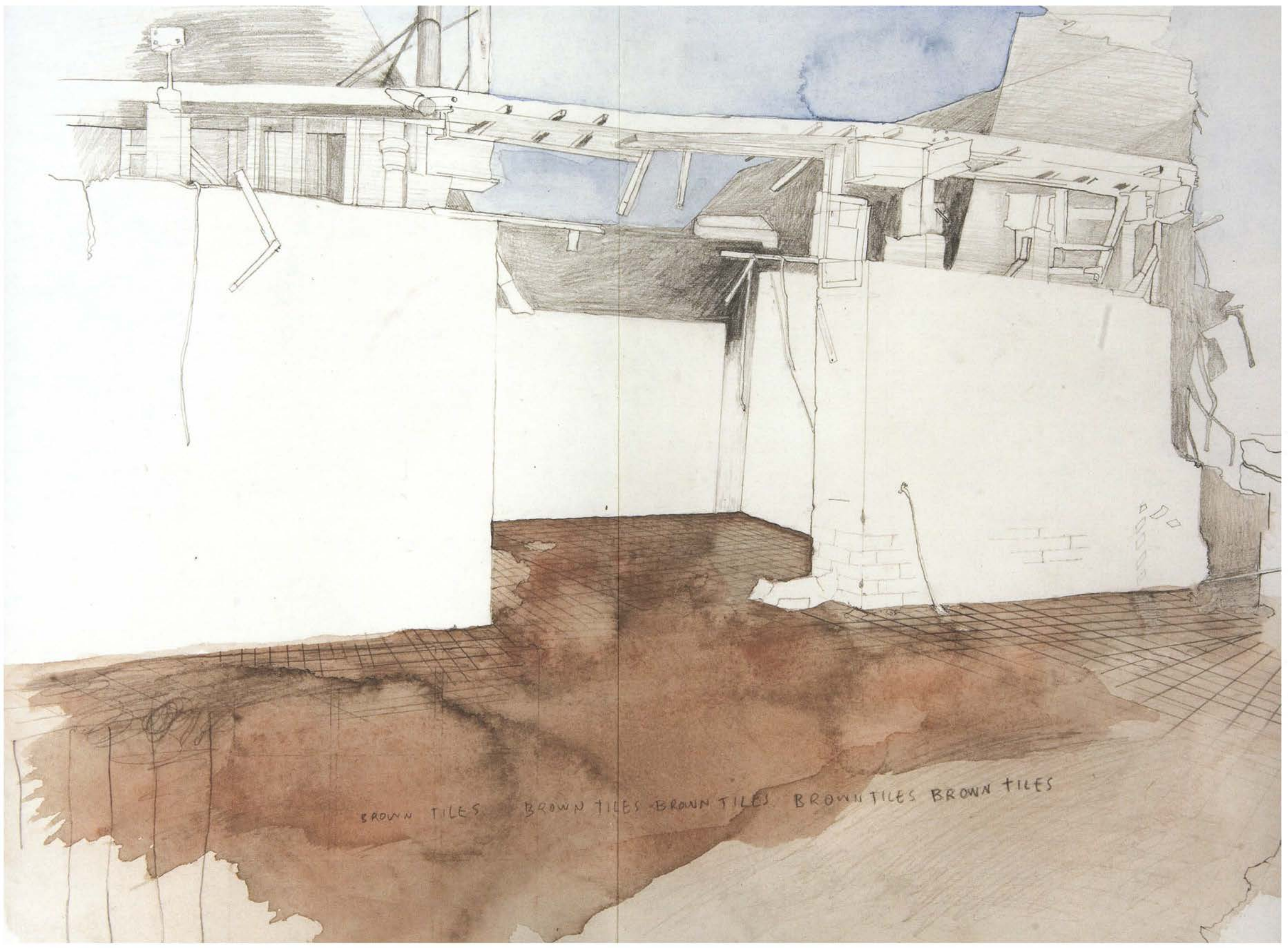
Site visits took place between
7 October 2008 and 2 February 2009
Pencil, watercolor on paper

Fiona Connor's drawings
photographed by Jennifer French



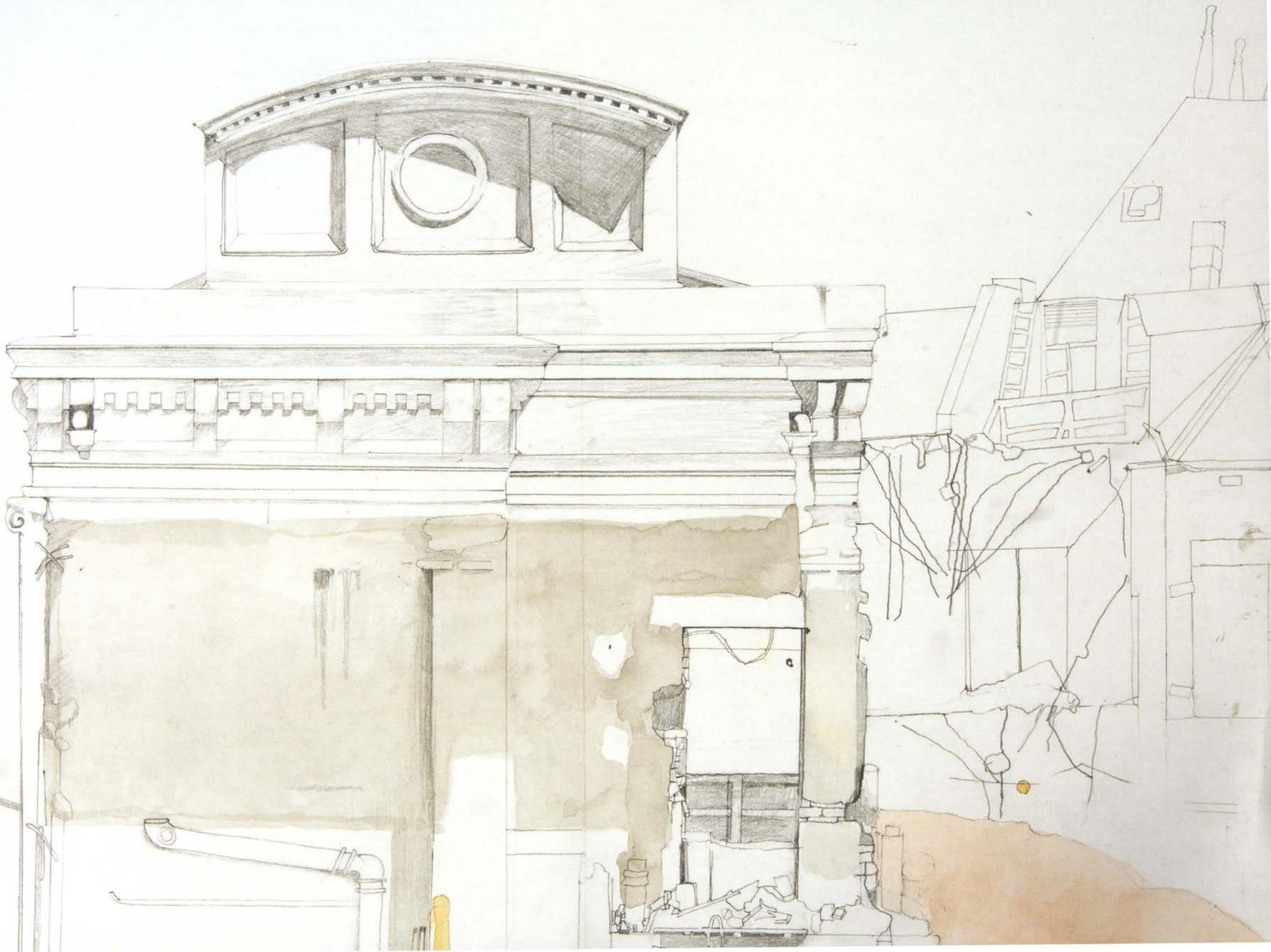


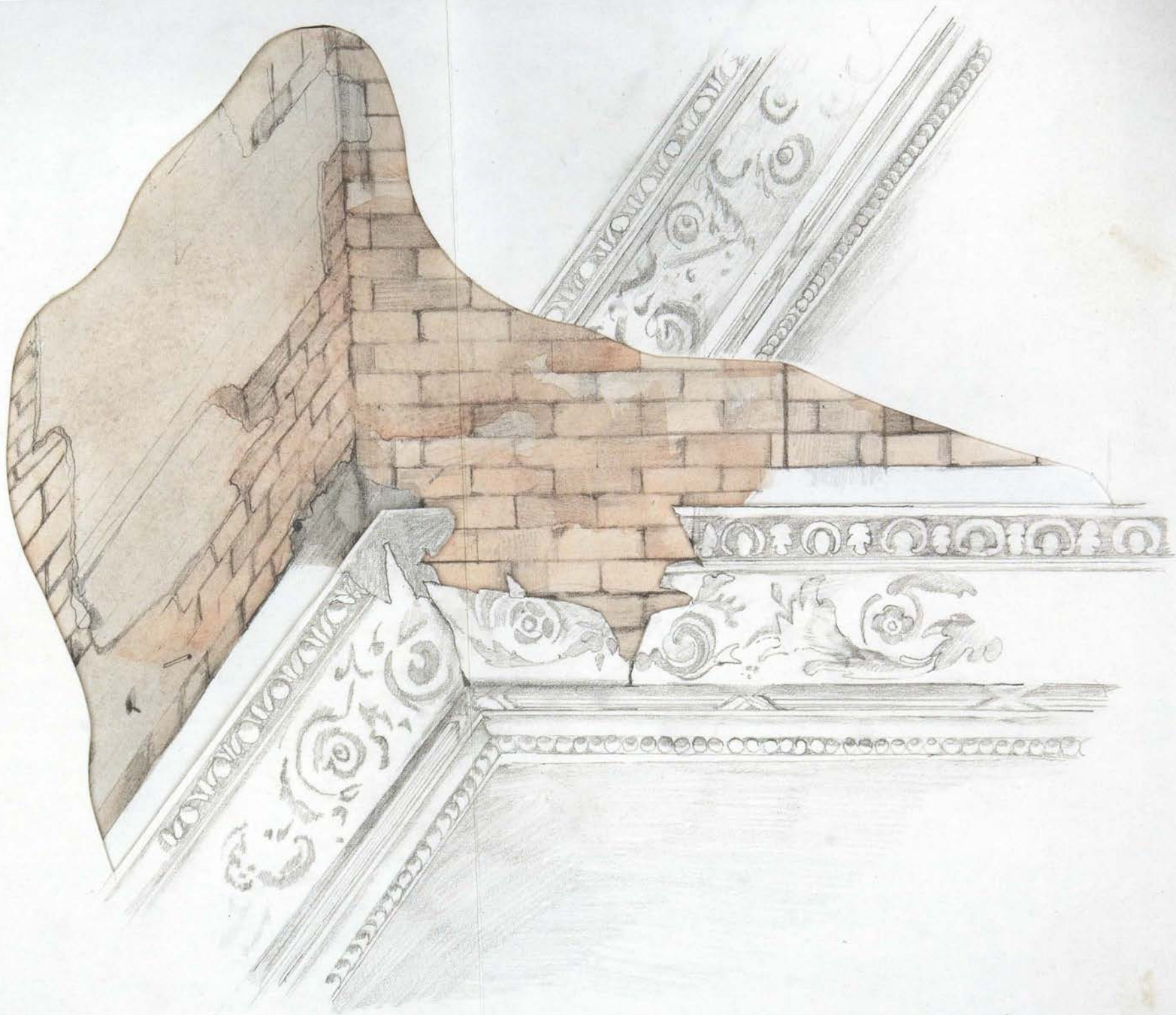




BROWN TILES BROWN TILES BROWN TILES BROWN TILES BROWN TILES







TOP

Photograph from *Ringling
Museums Newsletter*

"Curator Peter Tomory in
newly installed Gallery 18."
September 1972

Peter Tomory Archive
E.H. McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

BOTTOM

Photograph from
Auckland Art Gallery
Newsletter no. 32 1989

"Speakers who took part
in the Friends panel
discussion on Colin
McCahon. From left to
right – Chris Cathcart,
Hamish Keith, Peter
Tomory, Brenda Gamble
and Pat Hanley."

Tomory was in Auckland
to open the exhibition

Colin McCahon:

Gates and Journeys

Peter Tomory Archive
E.H. McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

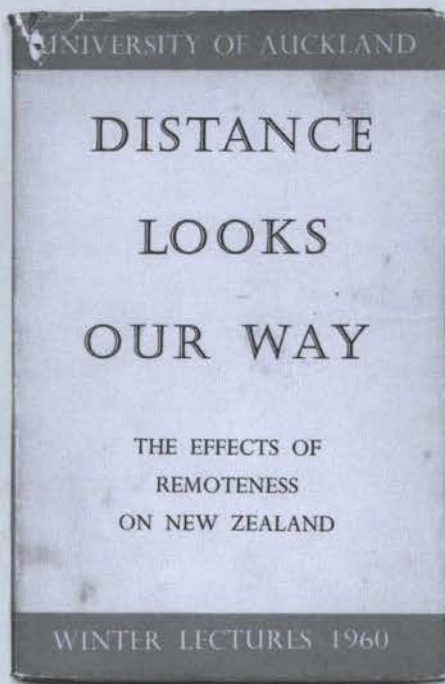


Book cover
*Distance Looks Our Way:
the Effects of Remoteness
on New Zealand 1961*
University of Auckland
Includes a lecture by
Peter Tomory
Peter Tomory Archive
E.H. McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tamaki

Delving into the archive of someone recently deceased has a somewhat indecent feel to it, as if one is furtively going through drawers while their owner is out of the room. Meeting someone in the flesh gives you one kind of perspective, but reading things they have written, particularly if documents cast light on their character, interests, or private life, can seem intimate in the extreme. One understands Katherine Mansfield's plea to Middleton Murry to edit her belongings, "...and leave all fair", before others cast their prying eyes over them.¹ Unlike Mansfield, Peter Tomory (1922-2008) personally selected the contents of his archive before it was sent to the E.H. McCormick Research Library at Auckland Art Gallery, but even so, the feeling remains.

The bulk of the archive, however, relates specifically to Tomory's career as a curator, director and art historian. Born in Hong Kong, and educated in India and Britain, Tomory served in the Royal Navy during the Second World War. From the beginning, Tomory had literary ambitions. A sheaf of typed poems composed while on active service talk of war's futility, while a much longer poem describes his feeling of alienation when visiting Oxford (possibly when on leave), with a rejection slip from the editor of *Horizon* magazine clipped to it. Notes and a first draft for a war memoir are in the same folder, along with an edited version sent to Auckland after his death by his London print dealer and friend, Christopher Mendez.

After he was paid off from active service, Tomory was looking at some drawings in Bournemouth when he came across Roger Fry's introductory lecture for the Courtauld Institute, an epiphany which revealed what his future direction should be.² Taking



advantage of the open access to tertiary education offered to ex-servicemen, he went on to gain a Master's degree in art history at Edinburgh University. His interest in art had first been sparked by a visit to Germany in 1937 after reading a new Pelican publication in German on *Die Brücke* and *Blaue Reiter*. When invited to tea with the Director, Hans Hess, after starting work as a curator at York Art Gallery, he was therefore able to impress Hess with his knowledge of contemporary German art movements. After Hess inquired what Tomory intended to do with his knowledge, he replied that he didn't have the slightest idea, and would therefore have to invent himself. The older scholar shot back; "Something tells me, Mr Tomory, that you won't find that particularly hard!"³

November

1991

7 Thursday Genoa
 Palazzina Reale - Real
 First. Except local
 apparitions including
 gallery with mirrors and
 antique statuary. Like
 Palazzo Borja in Rome.
 Total visit took 2 hours.
 Walked about the town.
 Rained & held about 2 -
 Sept. badly.

8 Friday Genoa - Milan
 Walked south of
 platform at the last
 minute. However fast
 train in Milan at
 10.5. Got nice hotel
 near station. Metro
 to Borja. Impressive
 very odd to see G. there
 like this. Lunch in
 piazza - used after
 last night. Had a set of

Food restaurant

1991

November

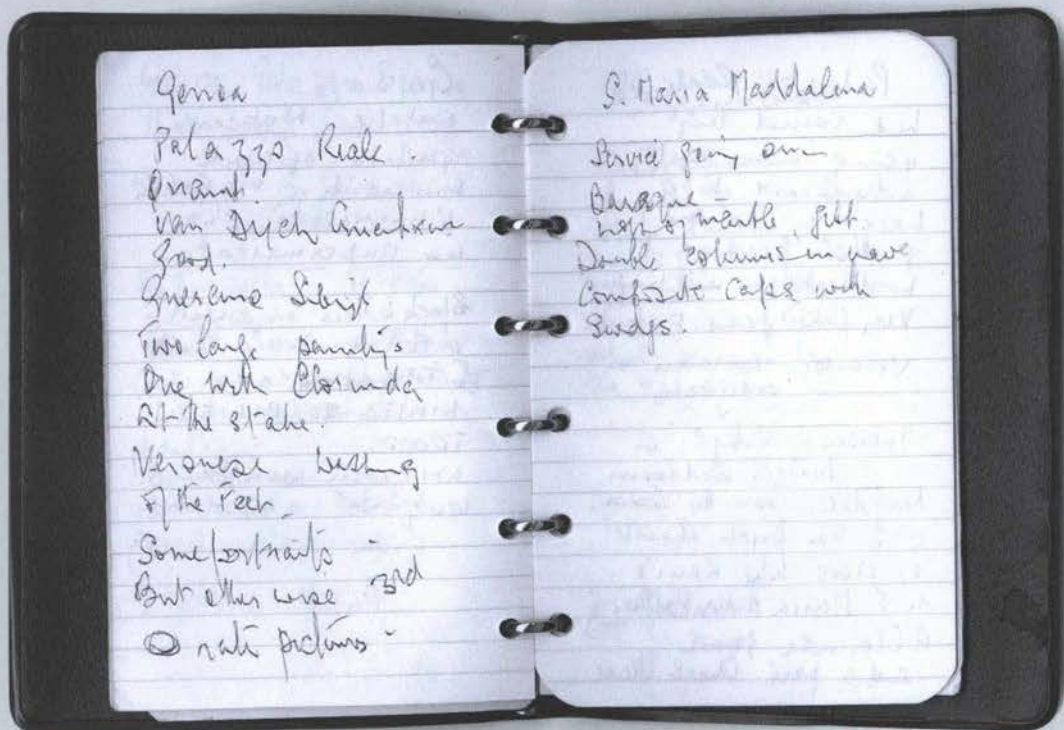
Milan Saturday 9
 Out by train to Borja
 by metro. Maxwell's
 pictures. Got in free
 because I looked impressive.
 Bath by metro to station
 Bought some biscuits and
 chocolate for Monday.
 Returned to hotel after lovely
 cheaper restaurant.

MILAN Sunday 10
 Metro to Poldi Pezzoli.
 Exh. on History of
 the Milanese Court. 10L.
 Interest. Collection. Took
 back to station. Snatched
 there and returned to hotel
 to watch tennis. Dinner
 was great at Poldi -
 watched more tennis -
 Bed.

Peter Tomory moved from York to the Leicester Art Gallery in 1951, before being appointed as the second professional director of Auckland City Art Gallery from 1956-65. In New Zealand he worked tirelessly to research and expand the Gallery's international collection, drawing on his professional relationships with many of the major European art historians of his day. At the same time, he was a constant advocate for emerging New Zealand artists. In particular, he had a huge respect for friend and colleague Colin McCahon, although they sometimes had violent disagreements about New Zealand art. The ease with which he negotiated the seemingly

disparate worlds of both Baroque art and European modernism, displaying equal erudition in both fields, remained apparent throughout his career.

His acquisition of 37 Henri Fuseli watercolours for Auckland in 1965, and his later writings on them, including the catalogue produced to accompany an exhibition of the works in Auckland in 1967, earned him his international reputation as a scholar. Amongst his ephemera, there is a letter dated April 5, 1996 to the *Times Literary Supplement*, upbraiding a letter writer for describing Henri Fuseli as "notoriously a hair-maniac." His retort was sharp and to the point:



Tomory's notebooks
from 1991 detailing travel
to Genoa and Milan
Peter Tomory Archive
E.H. McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tamaki

There is no evidence I know of to suggest that the artist's contemporaries, when they saw him called him, even *sotto voce*, 'the Swiss hair-maniac'. In truth, they could not, for hair-fetishism was unrecognised and un-identified in their time. In fact, it is demonstrable that Fuseli's use of hair was emblematic of role or character – his prostitutes, etc... I have always wondered in regard to this obsession that a finger has not been pointed at Hogarth, whose etching 'The Five Orders of Periwigs', running from Parsonic to Queerinthian, is more hirsute than any work by Fuseli...

After resigning from Auckland City Art Gallery, he taught at Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland, and then at Columbia University in New York, before taking up the role of curator at the Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Florida. The greater part of his academic career, however, was spent as an art history lecturer at La Trobe University in Melbourne, ultimately being appointed Emeritus Professor of that institute. Tomory's success in promoting New Zealand's national and international collections in the late 1950s and early 1960s was repeated in Australia. His archive contains a letter from Sheridan Palmer, University of Melbourne,



P.C. May. 06.
Er badete sic in dem blüete
Sin suot wart hurriu--

 PREFACE

The discovery of these hitherto unknown Fuseli drawings followed the pattern that one reads about but rarely, if ever, experiences.

In 1963 Mr Peter Tomory, at that time Director of the Auckland City Art Gallery, was visiting Dunedin, New Zealand. This city is almost as far as one can possibly travel from the lands of Henry Fuseli. Mr Tomory had concluded an inspection of privately-owned paintings when his hostess hesitantly remarked that they had some drawings which might be worth looking at. The works reproduced in this volume are the drawings. Time alone will tell, but it is doubtful if a more significant artistic discovery will ever occur in New Zealand again. The thirty-seven drawings were subsequently catalogued by Mr Tomory. In 1965 the owner sold the collection to the Auckland City Art Gallery. At this date it comprises one of the

world's great collections of Fuseli's work, filling in at one stroke, a number of gaps in our knowledge of Henry Fuseli's historical development.

Whatever happened, this major find may have been missed had not circumstances placed a trained and perceptive art historian in the critical position at the crucial time. Furthermore, that Mr Peter Tomory, now Senior Lecturer in the History of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland, has consolidated his find by research leading to this valuable publication.

We are very grateful, that the Trustees of the Paul Mellon Foundation for British Art, the University of Auckland and the Council of the City of Auckland have made grants towards the cost of this publication; and to all those who have helped to bring this work to fruition.

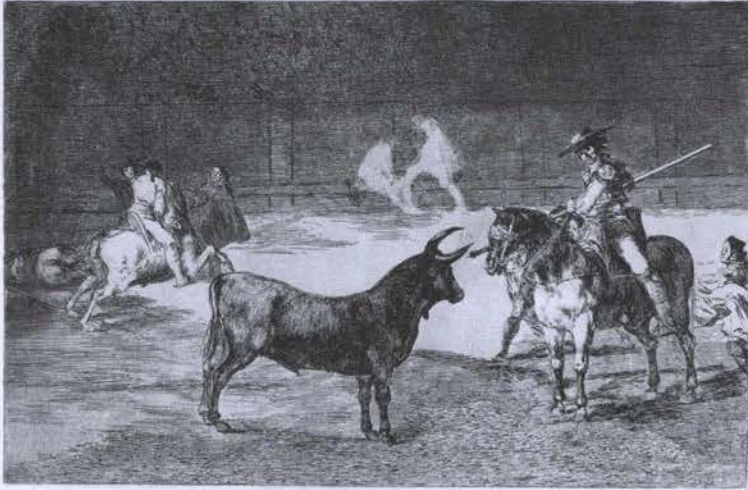
G. DOCKING

DIRECTOR

AUCKLAND CITY ART GALLERY

LEFT
Henry Fuseli
*Siegfried Having Slain
Fafner the Snake* 1806
Pen, pencil and grey wash,
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o
Tāmaki, purchased 1965

ABOVE
Preface by Gil Docking
Page from exhibition
catalogue
*A Collection of Drawings
by Henry Fuseli, RA*
Auckland City Art Gallery,
1967



written in 2001, noting how he both recognised and valued Tomory's position as one of those who "contributed to the development and the internationalising of culture in Australia in the 1970s."

Much of the archive is comprised of diaries; tiny notebooks crammed with lists of paintings viewed in European and American galleries; handwritten lists of works he included in art history lectures; folders of course work for his classes at La Trobe; and printed publications and drafts of academic texts (some published, some not). He used a dual notebook system, one recording the institutions visited in a particular city and lists of paintings for future use in lectures, and the second with quotes obtained from literary and art historical texts. This system had begun in New Zealand – he kept detailed notes of local artists he wished to visit nationwide, alongside lists of their works for possible purchase for the Gallery and detailed records of works in public collections. Later, on his many travels in Europe, he includes

themes that he wishes to expand upon in his lectures. When writing about the Sack of Rome he notes; "hysteria... (wrath of God)!!!" and you can imagine his voice in a lecture quoting "Chap. II of Hook – Charles V: 'I shall go into Italy and revenge myself on those who have injured me, especially the poltroon, the Pope.'"⁵ He also collected postcards of paintings to be used in some of his tutorials, it being difficult to obtain slides of lesser known images in a pre-digital age.

In the diaries and notebooks his handwriting veers on occasion towards the incomprehensible – possibly because he writes while standing in front of a picture or on a moving train between cities, but it is also on these trips that snippets of personal reference emerges. In 1960 he carefully recorded the shoe sizes for his two young sons, while in later diaries each page is headed up with the city he is staying in, along with references to accommodation, expenses, and food and wine consumed. He seems to have had a lifelong passion for salmon, which he not only

LEFT

Francisco de
Goya y Lucientes
*The Celebrated
Picador Fernando del
Toro Draws the Fierce
Beast on with his Pique
[El Célebre Fernando
de Toro, Barilarguero,
Obligando à la Fiera
con su Garrocha]* 1876
Etching, burnished
aquatint, drypoint
and burin
Peter Tomory Collection,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki, purchased
2004

Travel itinerary
Folded in pocket of
notebook from 1991
Peter Tomory Archive
E.H. McCormick Research
Library, Auckland Art
Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Itinerary Oct 2 - Nov 15

Oct 2 LH 789 2245 Airport 2045 Frankfort/Berlin
Oct 3 Berlin Queen's Hotel Guntzel Strasse 14
Oct 7 Berlin - Hamburg Hotel Opfer Drehbahn 15-23
Ph. 040 - 356.010
Oct 10 Hamburg - Dover
Oct 11 Dover - Edinburgh c/o Mitchell 1 Caroline Place
Edinburgh 12 Ph. 031 - 334.5613
Oct 15 Kelso c/o Bruce Stables Cottage Town Yetholm nr
Kelso Roxburghshire Ph. 57382 - 649
Oct 19 Berwick - London Jesmond Hotel 63 Gower St W.C.1
Ph. 071 - 636.3199
Oct 28 London - Paris ???
Nov 02 Paris - Lyon ???
Nov 04 Lyon - Genoa ???
Nov 08 Genoa - Milan ???
Nov 11 Milan - Frankfort ???
Nov 15 Frankfort - Melbourne LH 788
Nov 16 Arr Melbourne 1640

ordered in restaurants but also served to guests on numerous occasions, but he also carefully transcribed a recipe for pork pie, obviously planning to expand his repertoire.

Several trips were made to Budapest, and there are intriguing notes about a cemetery in Istanbul, which he reveals in a later diary as a search for his Hungarian great-grandfather, Alexander Tomory, who converted from Judaism to the Free Church of Scotland. A photocopy of an obituary for Rev. Tomory, published in the Free Church Monthly Record, September 1895, and titled *Among the Jews*, records that he was born in Weisskirchen in Moravia on May 23, 1818, and that as a young adult he took an arts course before studying medicine. Peter Tomory must have been fascinated at certain resonances with his own career, for his antecedent had also gone to Edinburgh after his conversion to study at New College, before spending the rest of his life in Constantinople, devoted to converting "the Israelites" to

Christianity. The article also drew attention to the fact that the older Tomory was able to speak (and preach) in seven languages. Scholarship, therefore, was in the blood.

Part of the archive also relates to Tomory's accumulation of what was to become a superb folio of sixteenth to eighteenth-century prints, (now part of Auckland Art Gallery's collection) which he acquired on the research trips he took to Europe, building relationships with London dealers such as Colnaghi, Roland, Browse and Delbanco, and latterly Christopher Mendez. The only specific purchases mentioned are those from the latter, who has stated elsewhere that Tomory first contacted him regarding acquisitions in 1971. Diaries have tantalising references to individual prints — on October 21, 1991, for example, he bought two Francesco Goya etchings from Mendez — a first edition print from the *Caprichios* and a *Bull Fight*, but no specific mention of why he selected them. These prints, used



*Ex collectione Bartholomaei Caraceppi
Statuarii Romani.*



**RACCOLTA DI ALCUNI DISEGNI
DEL BARBERI DA CENTO DETTO IL GUERCINO**
*Incisi in rame, e presentati al singolar merito del Sig. Tommaso
Jenkins Pittore, ed Accademico di S. Luca, in atto di rispetto,
d'amicizia dall' Architetto, e suo Coacademico
Gio. Battista Piranesi.*

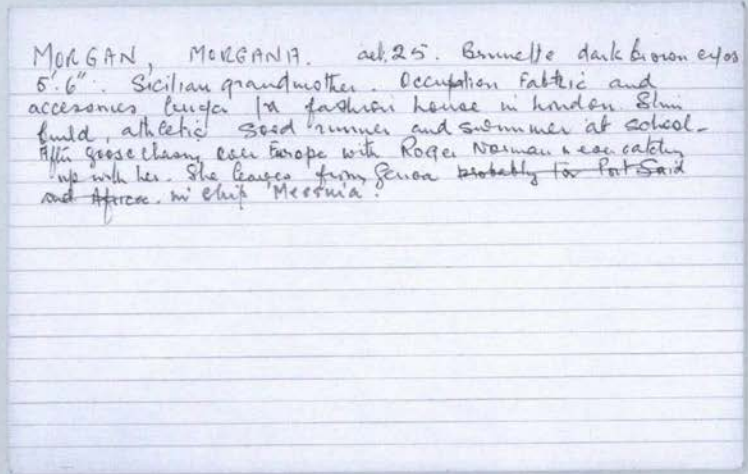
*Si vendono presso il medesimo Piranesi nel Palazzo del Sig. Conte Tomacci, a
Strada Felice vicino alla Trinità de' Monti.*

LEFT

Giovanni Battista Piranesi
*Frontispiece to Collection
 of Designs by Barberi da
 Cento, called Guercino
 (Raccolta di alcuni disegni
 del Barberi da Cento detto
 il Guercino) 1764*
 Etching
 Peter Tomory Collection,
 Auckland Art Gallery Toi
 o Tāmaki, purchased 2004

RIGHT

Index card for character
 "Morgana Morgan"
 for unpublished novel
 Peter Tomory Archive
 E.H. McCormick Research
 Library, Auckland Art
 Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

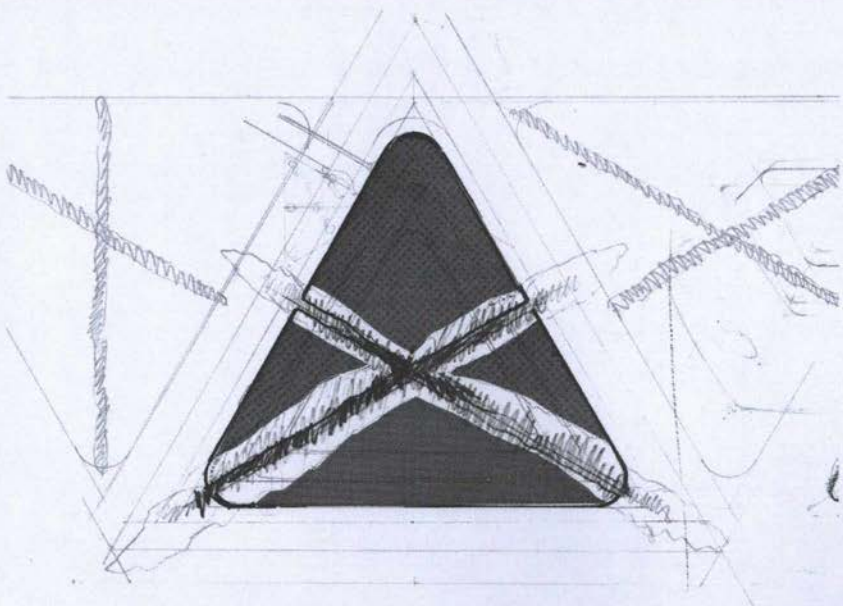


in Melbourne as a teaching aid, were to become an ongoing focus for research, and in one instance with quite unusual long-term results.

Once retired and living in Wareham in Dorset, Tomory could afford the luxury once more of expanding his approach to writing, now turning his hand to novels. The first, for which planning diaries exist in the archive, was a convoluted tale based on his many journeys round Europe, with the working title of *Too many hotels*. Mercifully, if his notebooks are anything to go by, it never saw the light of day, for how can you get away with a heroine called Morgana Morgan? A more successful attempt, however, was based on a work from his print collection, Piranesi's *Frontespizio della Raccolta di alcun disegni del Guercino*, the titlepage for a collection of etchings after drawings by Guercino, first issued in 1764 and again in 1773. While he had published an article about this etching in the Italian journal, *Storia dell'Arte*, no 99, 2000, the archive also includes the typed (he acquired a computer in 2001) manuscript of his second novel,

Roman Torso, a detective story based in 18th century Rome. It needs editing and certain references to the love interest's 'turquoise eyes' removed, but it makes for a very good read. Piranesi's frontispiece, or more accurately, titlepage, serves as a clue to what is in effect a murder mystery, based on the colourful life of the Grand Tourist and the dangers of dabbling in the Eternal City's thriving and conniving art market. Tomory has drawn together his personal and professional interests, and while it too, has never been published, it would be a wonderful tribute, not just to his erudition, but also his complexity as a man if an edited form of these literary "fragments" could eventually see the light of day.

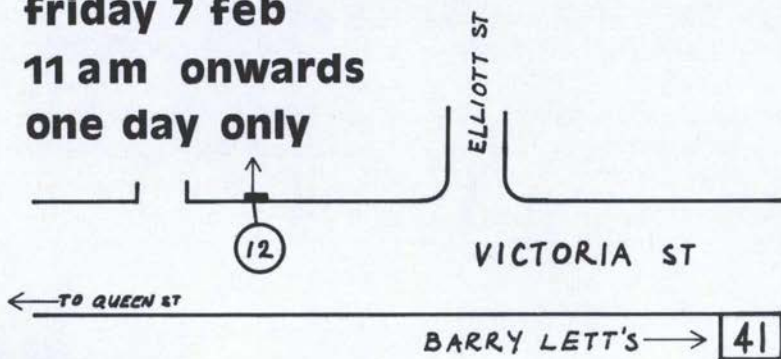
1. Letter from Katherine Mansfield to John Middleton Murry, August 7, 1922.
2. Conversation between Mary Kisler and Peter Tomory, Bovey Tracey, Devon, May 2006.
3. Conversation between Mary Kisler and Peter Tomory, 2004.
4. *A Collection of Drawings by Henry Fuseli, RA* (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 1967).
5. Judith Hook, *The Baroque Age in England* (London: Thames and Hudson, c1976).



WELDER'S WEAKNESS

works by Kieran Lyons

12 victoria st
friday 7 feb
11 am onwards
one day only



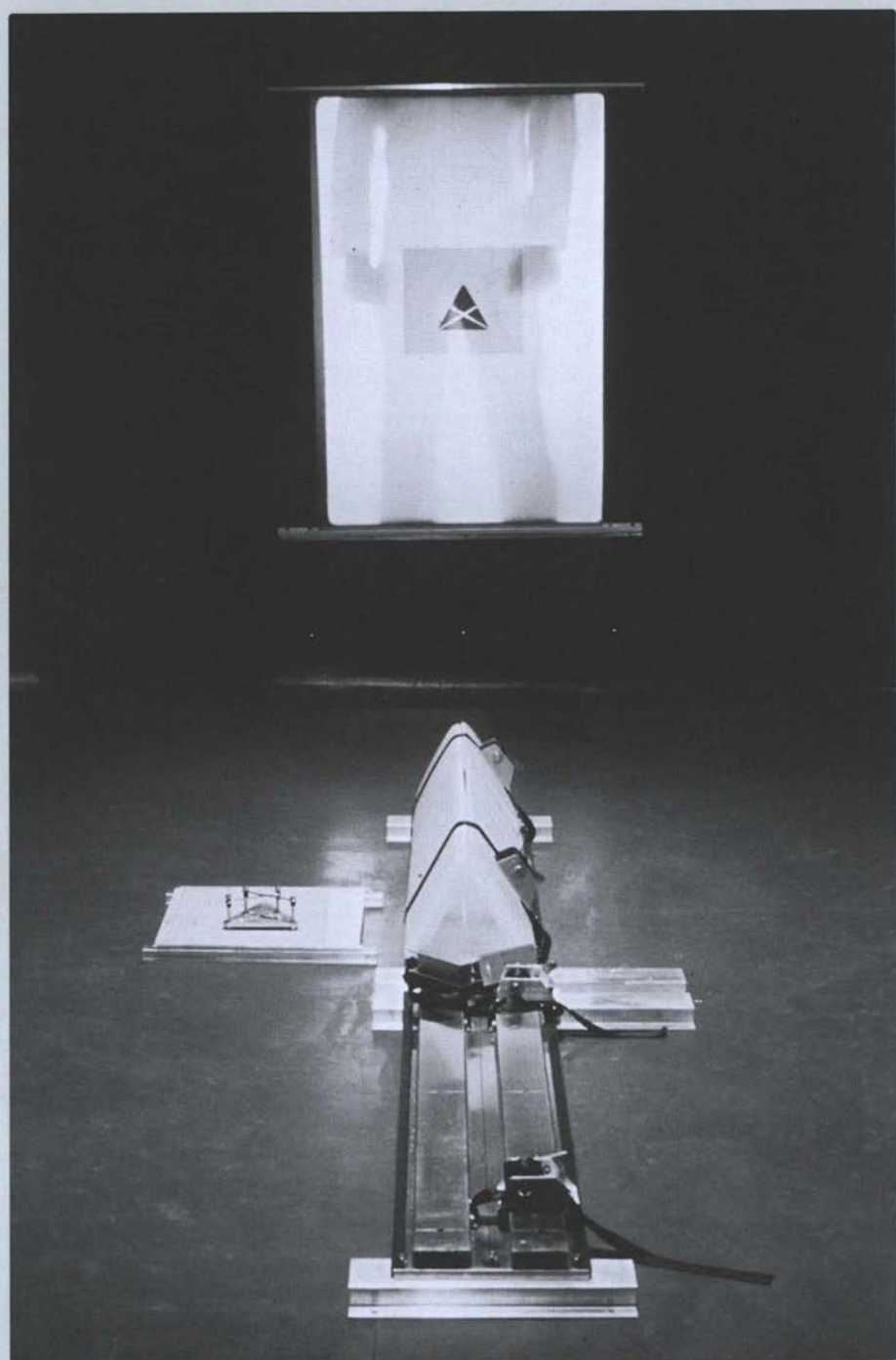
In conjunction with Barry Lett Galleries 1975

Poster for
Welder's Weakness
 1975
 Kieran Lyons's
 artists' file
 E.H. McCormick
 Research Library,
 Auckland Art Gallery
 Toi o Tāmaki

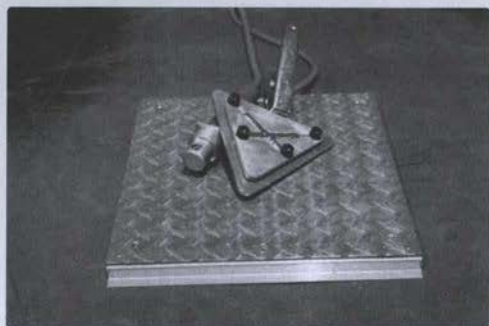
On Friday February 7, 1975, an exhibition of works by Kieran Lyons took place on the first floor of a now demolished building at 12 Victoria Street West in downtown Auckland in rooms the artist was using as a studio. It opened at 11am and lasted just over eight hours. Held in conjunction with Barry Lett Galleries, it was titled Welder's Weakness. There were two brief reviews, one by James Ross in The New Zealand Herald, and an incisive and enthusiastic account by Hamish Keith in The Auckland Star, but otherwise this one-day exhibition passed by unnoticed. By contrast, two other exhibitions by Lyons from this time, Superimpression, 1973, and Spring from the Cross, 1974, were (for the time) very well documented in a book, New Art, Some recent New Zealand sculpture and post-object art, 1976, edited by Jim Allen and myself.¹ Lyons was a notable omission from Action Replay, post object art, the series of exhibitions revisiting the history of conceptualist practice in New Zealand organised by Artspace and the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in 1998. As I was also a member of the curatorium

that selected artists for those exhibitions, I bear some responsibility for these omissions and I am grateful for the archive section of Reading Room for creating a space to address them here.

Two years before the exhibition Kieran Lyons had taken up the invitation of a post as visiting lecturer in sculpture at the Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland. Following the retirement of a senior member of staff, some years earlier, Jim Allen, then Head of Sculpture, had persuaded the University to convert the position into a permanent visiting lectureship. Lyons' predecessor was Adrian Hall, who had suggested him to Allen when Hall's own tenure was drawing to a close. Hall and Lyons were both from the United Kingdom but had met at the Yale University's School of Art and Architecture when they were both studying for their MFAs. Richard Serra, Robert Morris and Denis Oppenheim were among their teachers. Lyons also worked as a studio assistant to Naum Gabo. After his three years at Yale (1968–1971), he returned to the United



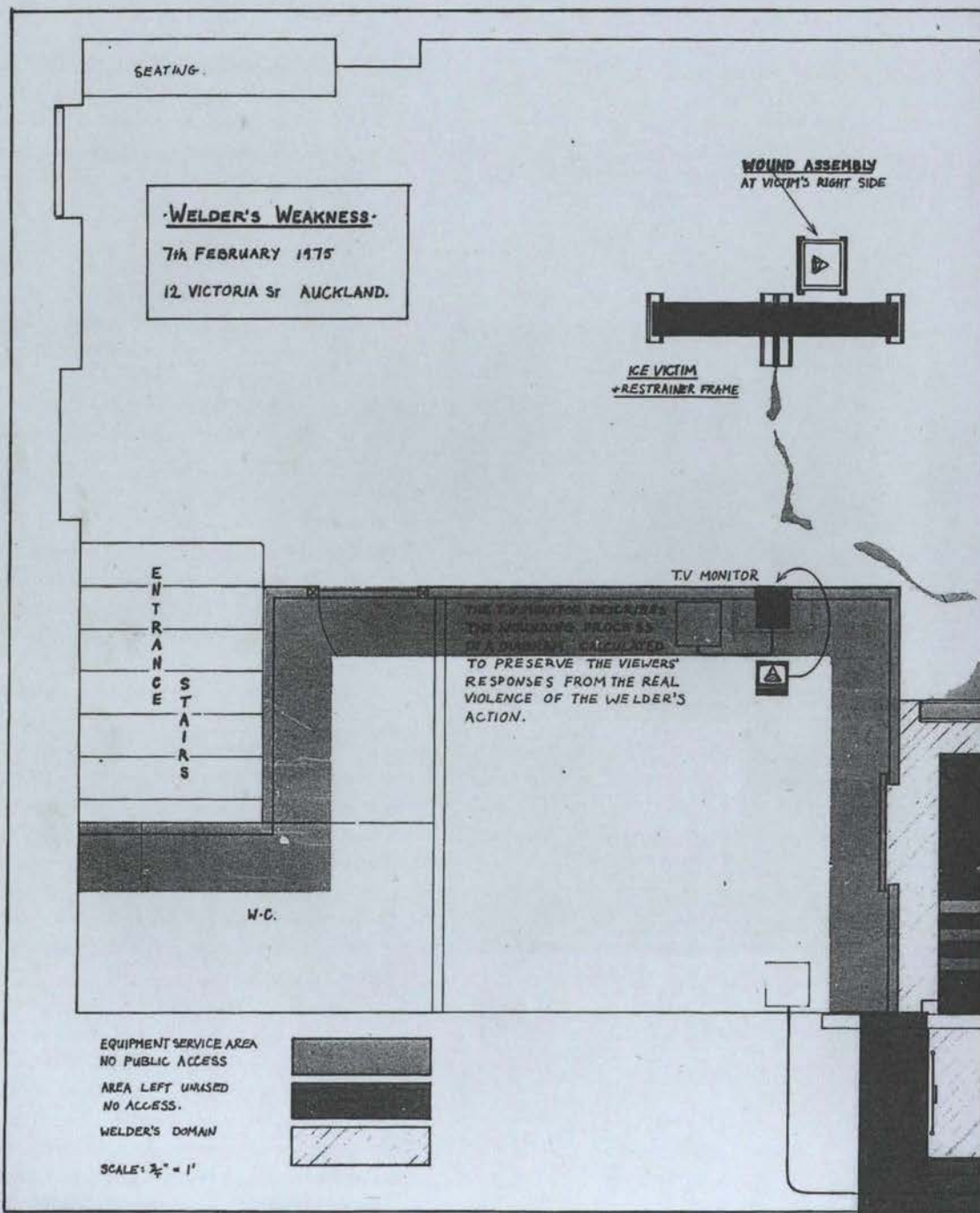
LEFT, BELOW
 Kieran Lyons
Welder's Weakness
 1975
 Installation views
 Courtesy of the artist
 Photos: Bryony Dalefield

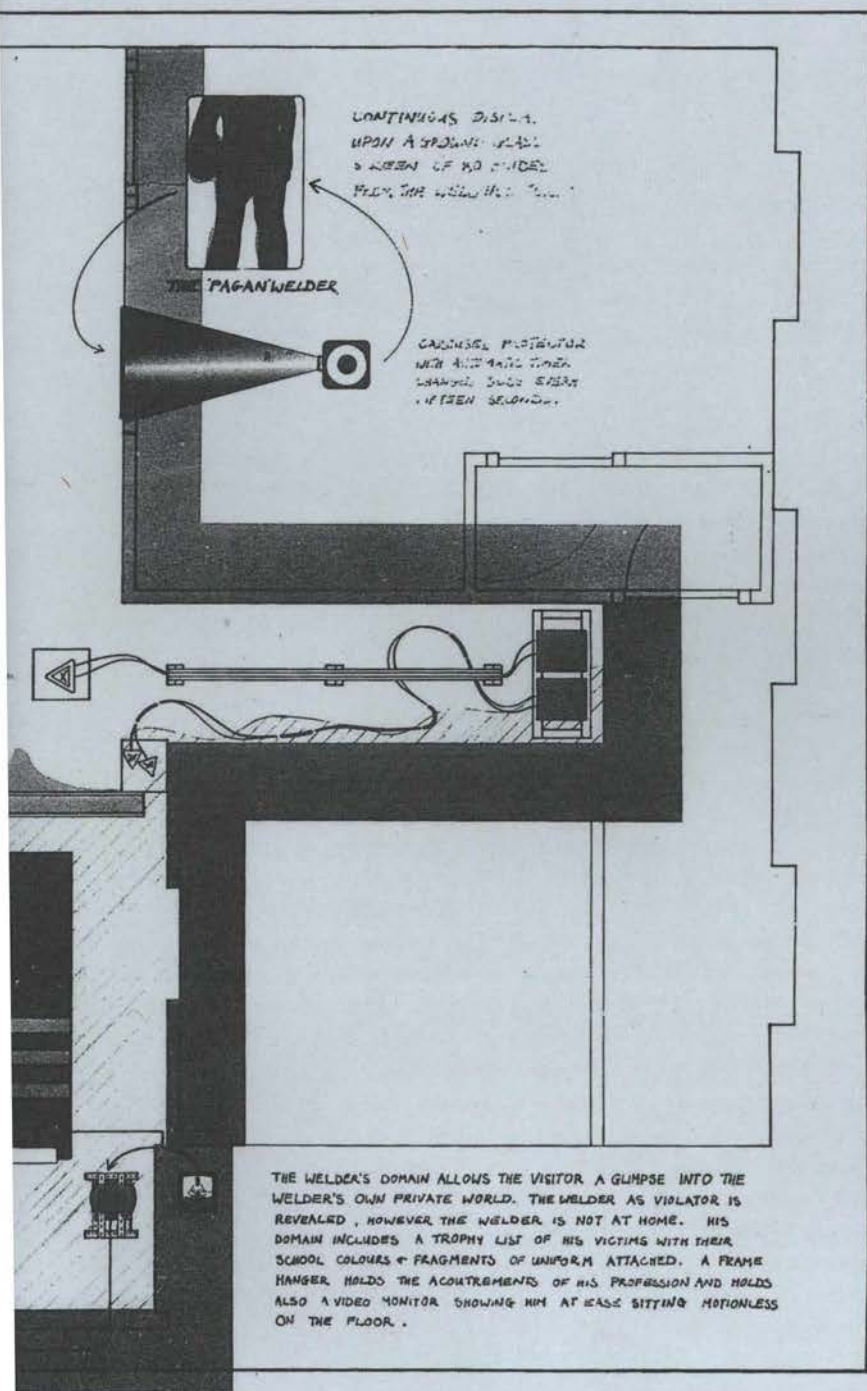


Kingdom. Lyons worked in Auckland from 1973–1975, before returning to the U.K. Now Head of Programme at the Newport School of Art at the University of Wales, he recalls being shocked to find in Auckland a scene so intense in its engagement in art-making; as demanding, rich, and stimulating than New Haven had been. There were students at Elam — Bruce Barber, Maree Horner, Roger Peters and Malcolm Ross in particular — who were making work he admired and learned from, as were the teachers, Adrian Hall, who had stayed on in Auckland, and Jim Allen.

Welders' Weakness is a complex and significant work in its own right, of a piece with *Superimpression* and *Spring from the Cross*, which had preceded it, and like them closely linked to significant works by other Auckland artists of the time. As Lyons played the key role of "Blind master" in Bruce Barber's *Mt Eden Crater Performance*, 1973, put the bucket over Barber's head for his *Bucket Action* 1973, so Roger Peters posed as the "Welder" and the "Ice Victim" in the slides for *Welder's Weakness*.² Even today Lyons' triad of installation/events defy easy definition but in their time and place they were representative of a genre of practice under development in the works of Barber, Lyons, and Allen that was indicative of early 1970s New Zealand art at its most ambitious and idiosyncratic. Barber's *Mt Eden Crater Performance*, and Allen's *Contact*, like Lyons' works, involved multiple participants performing assigned tasks and assuming particular roles, the recycling of video documentation back into the work, and elements of symbolic narrative bound by site and time specific co-ordinates. It is a genre which occupied common ground with the New Zealand Scratch Orchestra and From Scratch event/performance initiated by Phil Dadson.

Lyons three works present a fictional corporation. E-Z Gro in the first two, a name which announces a faith in growth, in progress. Otherwise the organisation appears entirely self-serving. We might speculate as to whether its business is farming or venture capital but from what we can see it is actually entirely occupied with manufacturing and distributing its own logo. *Superimpression's* aim, one which it takes quite literally, offering to stamp its trademark on the forehead of viewers, while in





Kieran Lyons
Welder's Weakness
 1975
 Diagram of installation

a nearby workshop welders and cutters can be seen and heard manufacturing steel stencils with which to paint or cast the trademark on objects or structures. The corporation embodies a marketing mania in which branding comes before production in an irrational compulsion to mark every thing and every body as a commodity for exchange.

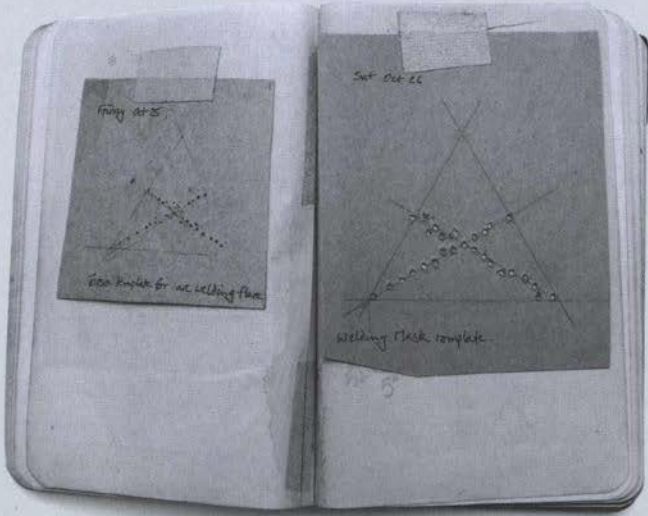
Each of Lyons' installations has a similar architecture of workshop or backstage spaces. There is a front-of-house area, involving contacts with the public, customers, clients, viewers: reception areas, waiting rooms, stages. And then there are back rooms, which seem off-limits to the public, workshop spaces, back stage. With *Superimpression* and *Spring from the Cross* these are all clean well not to say starkly lit spaces, functionally furnished, staff are kitted out in white company overalls, but in *Welder's Weakness* the company appears in a rather different light. These are makeshift premises, they have seen better days and who knows what previous tenants. It's all a bit hole-in-the-wall. The Welder's Domain, his "backroom" is in a fire corridor, closed off by a set of shiny steel sliding doors. Behind those doors was a large area of the building which had recently been burnt and, although the exhibition space showed no trace of this, the smell permeated the exhibition and contributed its own literal trace of fire and water to the semiotics of the installation. What branch of the business is this? The logo is different, a triangle, with a criss-cross mark on it. What was that list of names of Auckland secondary schools, and their school – their "corporate" – colours doing on those three long steel plates in his den? Colours that seem to correspond with those on the cut steel triangles piled up there? Perhaps the Welder is doing a little business on the side? Is he free-lancing after work? There are two arc welding sets, one is clean (this is company property?) The other, surrounded by the steel triangles is dirty, to whom does it belong? But is he really working alone? Maybe he's on contract to someone else? and for what purpose? Or else, could it be that E-Z Gro as a whole is a front for some far less salubrious enterprise? Is the Welder's weakness his compliance, his willingness to do the company's dirty work?

In *Superimpression*, the brand or logo occurs as a "stamp" temporarily impressed on the forehead and as a metal stencil or template in production. In *Spring from the Cross*, the brand acquires religious credentials: Christian signs (the stamps are impressed on the body where Christ's stigmata occurred) and ritual (the stencil describe paths comprising 14 stations) converted (as in cars are "converted"?) to E-Z Gro ends. Now the company "springing" from the Cross, enjoys a new growth phase. In *Welder's Weakness* the applications are sexual, and sinister: the genitals (of school girls and boys?) have been targeted (the new logo is like a target) and in a violent manner. Sex, it's the way to go. The backroom action of acetylene torches had, in *Superimpression*, unsettled the quiet front of house, here even though dormant, the Welder's "thermic lances", as they were known in the trade, appeared phallic, dangerously so. Similarly, with the video image of the seated cross-legged Welder, his apparent state of quiet contemplation was deceptive. His heavily helmeted head was a truer expression of the threat he posed. The heap of metal "templates" in his den, were now to be understood as a collection of "trophies", a record of his violent and depraved deeds.

The focus of all this disturbing stillness and suppressed danger was the large triangular structure of cast ice sheets strapped to a frame in the centre of the main space of the show. What quietly and uncannily dominated the installation was the progress of the Welder's "victim" whose slow melting would measure the duration of the exhibition, and whose solid whiteness would gradually wet and slowly spread across the blood red linoleum floor on which it lay. It would be this that brought the work together as a single, complexly charged affect, and this that would make the sharpest and the most lasting impression on the viewer.

The author thanks Kieran Lyons for his help in preparing this article.

1. Jim Allen and Wytan Curnow, eds., *New Art, Some recent New Zealand sculpture and post-object art*, (Auckland: Heinemann, 1976), unpaginated. Fourteen pages were devoted to these two works.
2. See Lyons' comments in the discussion following this piece in *New Art*.



Pages from Kieran Lyon's notebook

girls	Red, Green + White
St. Mary's School	Red, Royal B + White
Green Bay High School	Red, Gold
Salt Lake High School	Green + Gold
Ark. State Grammar	Dark b + Gold
St. Ignace College	White + Green
Bl. Dominic College	Light green + green
Ark. grammar	Dark b + Gold
Lambert College	Maroon + black
Epsom Girls Grammar	D. Blue + Gold
Mt. Albert	light blue + Gold
Mt. Kaitake Grammar	Red, Royal B, Yellow
Lynfield College	White, Green + Yellow
Wanganui College	Black + white
St. Mary's College	Dark blue + white

FAN scrapbook
Compiled by
Claudia Pond Eyley
Feminist Art
Networkers' Archive,
E.H. McCormick
Research Library,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki



I'm back in the archives and opening the Feminist Art Networkers (FAN) box in the reading room. With a view to contributing to *Reading Room*. With unsuitably grandiose memories of other reading rooms: Borges's labyrinthian library or that imperial, blue-domed Reading Room, now empty of readers. I really need to downsize, maybe to the traveling Art Library, an art archivist's miniature library trolley cabinet.¹ But that's a performance piece, with no physical reading room at all. This *Reading Room* you are reading is portable. It's a nice-looking, compact, tactile, rectangular, object. A non-digital, paged, vehicle for ideas. A book. And it has a space called "Archive", a treasure of a space, shelved at the back, ready for an "opening of the FAN."

But an archive "Archive" is not. It's a translation. FAN's archive remains in and out of the grey box, and I am about to read about the activities of a collective of women, including myself, who were involved from 1982 to 1988.² A curious task, as a generation has passed, and all of us continue to be actively engaged in culture, not "archival" at all. Still, an airing is called for.

But how to situate a response to a hot topic — feminist art/political activism, for that is precisely what FAN was about — out of its grey holding box and into the "Archive" of *Reading Room*, a cool container? Differences are at play, but it's clear that FAN will generate its own mark... and its heat... on its own shelf in the "Archive."

The cultural shake-up FAN was part of and contributed to in the 1980s — a brief reminder here — operated against the grain of what was, only a generation ago, a male-dominated, hegemonic art world. It had very few women artists, art academics, curators, writers, or histories including women artists. A major text, Janson's *History of Art*, had none.³ An art world whose early feminist artists, when they did first emerge in public, and call attention to their own subjectivities, as with the opening of the Wellington Women's Gallery in 1980, were dubbed as having "less to do with art than with politics and a form of therapy for disgruntled ladies."⁴ Politics and art did not mix, we were frequently instructed by reviewers conveniently forgetting certain key works of historical art. We obviously didn't "fit in", for reasons that are now familiar. Of course we wanted a different "fit", one that argued not only for more of us, in all contexts, to balance things up, but for different modes of practice, theory and production. And for the equal valuing of these.

The 27 years on from the "birth" of FAN does not diminish its heat.⁵ Much was achieved, as a result of FAN's and other feminists' efforts, in terms of generating information on New Zealand women artists, art/gender issues, and institutional change. Women artists, gallery directors, lecturers and curators now abound; books, papers and journal articles on women artists and issues of feminism and art practice multiplied. Conferences adopted gender issues as a theme. Different notions of what constituted "art"

and approaches to practice were explored. Recent selections for the Venice Biennale (which have included work by a collective previously associated with FAN), have shown a "healthy" balance. Juliet Batten looks back to FAN's varied interventions as "incredibly positive", and points to our shared professionalism, our cohesion, and our ease with then current debates in the arts, as factors behind FAN's effectiveness.

And we did have great fun: meetings may have been rigorous in their regularity (Monday evenings were favoured), not forgetting the challenge for mothers attending, and packed with proposed projects, recordings of what had and had not been done: "Liz Eastmond has not contacted Julie Ewington", I am admonished, then later redeemed: "Liz Eastmond has phoned Julie Ewington!", meriting an exclamation mark. There was, Alexa Johnston remembers, a productive mix of arts professionals and artists and members who were both. A member produced a small artist's book indicating her change of address. After another meeting, I am reminded, there was such unruly glee, including falling off sofas and giggling on the floor, that a kindly spouse offered to "hose us all down".

But issues and questions regarding women and art practice remain: the lower financial value placed on works by women; the continuing lack of major retrospectives of work by women artists – or when, as with Rita Angus, it's 40 years on; Australian critic Julie Ewington remarked ironically on the "balancing" out from the 1990s, at around 33 1/3% women artists to men in exhibitions and journal representation. Not bad enough for a fuss. And to what extent have institutional structures themselves changed? And why does Auckland have an annual street parade called Boobs on Bikes?

As artist and documentary film-maker Claudia Pond Eyley comments: "Yes, we did make a contribution, but we can't be complacent."

The collective's actions were varied, ranging from changes to the secondary school art syllabus,⁶ numerous "letters to the editor": *Te Maori*, we pointed out, represented creativity by one half of Maoridom: men only⁷; letters to "recalcitrant directors" (and curators): *The Grid*, it was advised, was also

gender-specific (male)⁸; seminars; workshops; keynote lectures⁹; statistical surveys (*Art New Zealand* got some flack: "colour reproductions of work by female artists 8, by male artists 90")¹⁰; production of the 1987 *Herstory Diary*;¹¹ design and distribution of postcards, and more.¹² Interventions were both positive, in the sense of raising the profile of work by women and of feminist art, and oppositional as, with a strong group voice, we attacked examples of contemporary culture's sexism – in the language of professional advice, crisply put.

It's also relevant to note that with the associated activities of FAN members within their respective employment/social bases, FAN's impact on culture widened.¹³ These included curating of exhibitions by several members, both inside and outside "the institution"; lecture series on women artists both institutional and non-institutional; exhibitions and art practice, some involving work with wider, non-professional groups; two women's work as art critics for major daily papers; three involved in institutional curatorial and directorial roles; two members' overlapping involvement in setting up an arts/literary journal; the writing of reviews, articles, and books.¹⁴

Indeed the subsequent, post-FAN engagement in culture by all FAN members continued, and continues, to carry the flag in many productive and diverse ways. Which may include, from recent time, putting the spotlight on Sir Edmund Hillary, the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Rainbow Warrior, the Venice and the Emirates Sharjah International Art Biennales, and cupcakes. All including, to a greater or lesser degree, a feminist perspective, of course. FAN was evidently also an incubator. But that is another story.

Important pre-cursors to FAN were the Women's Gallery, which opened in Wellington in 1980, which had had FAN-member involvement, similarly the Auckland Women Artists' Association, starting in 1981, which FAN became in a sense the advance guard of, and maintained close connections with. FAN's difference probably lay in its institutional links – most members either fully or partly in its employ – and in its clarity about the feminist project which had us, as Juliet puts it, all "on the same page". It was an example, she suggests, of a particularly effective splinter group. "The institution" also provided us



Selection of invitations
to FAN meetings
Feminist Art
Networkers' Archive,
E.H. McCormick
Research Library,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki

of the New Image show was [redacted] The curator
and he was of the opinion that no women artists had made major contributions
in this area over the past ten years.

I am writing to see if I can arrange a time to come
and see you with regard to the possibility of the Art Gallery
arranging for an exhibition of Judy Chicago's Birth Project.

While not denigrating the value of his work, we should
like to point out that as an artist he draws on a long and well-
established tradition. Quilts have been an important art form
in America and elsewhere for over two centuries.

Art Archive Proposal: Vivian Lynn

As an artist and teacher of women's art courses at Auckland
University, I should like to comment on the proposal by Vivian
Lynn to revive the Women's Art Archive. This is an exciting
project.

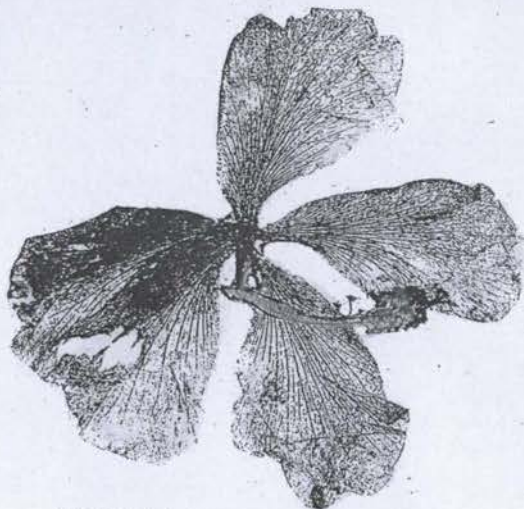
Copies of this letter have also been sent to...

Hon. Margaret Shields.
Hon. Michael Bassett.
Rt. Hon. David Lange.
Ray Rhorburn.
Bernard Duthie.
Anne Kirker.
Dr. Rodney Wilson.
Charmaine Pountney.
Professor Jolyon Saunders.
Ministry of Women's Affairs.

ABOVE
Details of FAN
correspondence
Feminist Art
Networkers' Archive,
E.H. McCormick
Research Library,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki

RIGHT
Invitation to Herstory
Diary meeting
Feminist Art
Networkers' Archive,
E.H. McCormick
Research Library,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tāmaki

HERSTORY DIARY 1987



MEETING AND DISCUSSION.
MONDAY MARCH 10th
1 CROMWELL STREET,
MT. EDEN, PH. 603091
at 7.45 p.m.

with an audience, contacts, and with a constituency. In the case of Alexa Johnston in particular, curating at the Auckland Art Gallery, this institutional base presented both productive possibilities — amply explored — and, also, unsurprisingly, in that she was working closely with colleagues whose agendas in relation to certain projects differed, with the occasional problematic.¹⁵

But were some of the radical cultural interventions boldly executed by Juliet Batten able to flourish more effectively due to her greater independence from the “institution”? She had maintained strong links with the cultural feminist movement, including radical lesbian feminism, and her curation of strongly feminist themes — *Woman to Woman*, say, in 1983 — showed an early exploration of new concepts only taken up later by more mainstream feminist academics.

It is also possible to argue, of course, that our institutional connections alienated the group altogether from other constituencies.

An obvious criticism of the group then and most certainly now was its limitation to middle-class Pakeha women, so locking in perspectives to the territory of the dominant culture. Awareness of this was addressed, to a degree, by the contacts made and the expanding of the collective for the 1987 *Herstory Diary*, a major FAN project, which, as reviewers commented, was notable for its inclusiveness in terms of representations of work by Maori and Pacific Island women, and for a cover featuring a korowai.¹⁶ But the group itself continued as exclusively Pakeha.

Most of FAN's own early style of presentation (there were some later changes) was linked with the so-called “essentialist” phase of the Women's Art Movement. This was expressed — knowingly — in the flutter of fans on agendas, a motif familiar from the North American 1970s and early 1980s cultural feminist art scene, and one particularly apt for a collective such as ours. This movement was central to ideas then developing in New Zealand. By the early 1980s here it had around 10 years under its belt, so a wealth of information, experience and tactics could be transmitted. The first FAN meeting noted the impact of Juliet Batten's contacts.¹⁷ I well remember

the excitement of opening a huge package of slides of work by women from the United States and other countries, piling them up on top of the University of Auckland's Art History Department's slide table and entering totally new territory.¹⁸ The American women's art movement, despite this being a pre-digital era, was adept at its “networking” — yes that's where we got it from, and it worked — and impressive in its packaging skills. But our unquestioning obedience to the American model now seems somewhat uncritical and a sign of the then dominance of American cultural imperialism. Why, it's easy to question now, didn't we take on board some of the more socialist-feminist ideas, say, coming out of the United Kingdom, especially given the direct links we had forged with expatriate New Zealand feminist artist Alexis Hunter?¹⁹

“Essentialism” became unfashionable from the mid-1980s on as critiques were launched by adherents to the then new “deconstructionist” school of thought. Two key events FAN was associated with injected particularly lively debate, and tension. One was FAN's invitation to Australian curator and critic Julie Ewington to be keynote speaker at the 1985 ANZART conference where she spoke on “Past the Post: Feminism and Postmodernism.”²⁰ She addressed a large audience and productively positioned feminism in relation to postmodernism, at a time when the term “post” had little traction in New Zealand and when the “F” word infrequently graced academic podiums. On the other hand, Lita Barrie's paper at the 1986 Critics' Symposium in Wellington showcased her grasp of contemporary theory but involved launching a scathing attack on New Zealand women artists' practices associated with essentialism, some of whom were associated with FAN.²¹

As a feminist art historian, I saw a series of overlapping, and often interlocking practices, instead of the much-vaunted antithesis between “essentialism” and “deconstruction”, which was becoming an annoyingly binary construct — and in fact, as a binary, was quite un-“postmodern”. But, despite that tension — and it would be unusual to find a wholly tension-free collective — Priscilla Pitts and myself included Barrie's paper in *ANTIC*, an arts/literary journal we were starting at the time, as well as Julie Ewington's paper. We wanted to generate debate.

Quite clearly from today's perspective you can look back to a diverse field of strategies, in their varying contexts, flourishing over what was in actuality a very short period of time.

FAN's years of operation spanned that debate and its members' ideologies did too, to a certain extent. But these co-existed – not only in the associated project of *ANTIC* (Juliet Batten wrote a reply to Barrie's paper)²² but in the group's own projects: look at FAN's second set of postcards where ritual installation works by Juliet Batten sit, at least physically, in the same plastic bag as the laconic text and image works by M. Tweedie.²³ You just had to be flexible with your frames of reference and maintain respect for difference – as was said at the time, and which remains, a useful instruction.

We "closed the FAN" in late 1988, a year after the 1987 financial crisis – to point, briefly, to the broader economic background.²⁴ Was it the pressure of full-time posts and demanding projects associated with them for most of us? A sense that things had been achieved? A natural drifting apart as directorial posts were taken up elsewhere? In my case a full-time job combined with the imminent birth of a child? Differences? Exhaustion? A mix of these factors perhaps. Certainly not as a result of so-called "post-feminism". But we felt clear about the time to stop, and about the time to "present the FAN" for safe-keeping.²⁵ We wanted our efforts relating to attempts to redress the gender balance and change the agenda in the arts in this country recorded. We were all only too well-aware at the start of FAN in 1982 of history's omissions regarding women's cultural production, and of the vital role of archives for cultural memory and cultural construction. Putting the lid back on the box now means, I hope, that this brief "showing of the FAN" will generate other, and different, takes on FAN and those six years in the 1980s, and on related projects. A vision of the FAN archives box wheeling around diverse locations and audiences, including reading rooms, in a version of Sarah Bodman's miniature traveling library trolley comes to mind. In the meantime this translation and partial representation of FAN on the shelf in the portable vehicle *Reading Room's* "Archive" section is the go.²⁶

1. Sarah Bodman's portable reference library of artists' books, touring 2001–2, the *Bristol Art Library*, in association with the Centre for Fine Print Research, University of the West of England, Bristol, U.K.
2. Feminist Art Networkers from 1982 were Juliet Batten, Elizabeth Eastmond, Claudia Pond Eyley, Alexa Johnston, Carole Shephard, Cheryl Sotheran and from 1985 included Priscilla Pitts and M. Tweedie.
3. H.W and D.J. Janson, 1st ed. *History of Art*, 1962. The 2006 revised doorstop includes women artists, decorative arts (for the first time) and discussion of issues of race, class and gender.
4. Neil Rowe, *Evening Post*, January 8, 1980.
5. The first meeting "announcing the birth of FAN" was on Monday, October 12, 1982, at "Juliet's place".
6. Carole Shephard's letter, September 11, 1987, to the Director-General of Education, pointed out the gender imbalance in a 1987 "slide-review" for schools produced by the Education Department, *Emblems of Identity*. She commented on the greater availability of texts on New Zealand women artists and called for "immediate action and change." Copies were sent to the Rt. Hon. David Lange, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, and others.
7. *New Zealand Listener*, December 14, 1984.
8. Letter to the Director, Auckland City Art Gallery, November 15, 1982.
9. Including, aside from individual FAN member's projects, involvement in: F1, the New Zealand Sculpture Project, 1982; Women's Art Archive Project, 1982; the New Zealand Students' Arts Council's *Sexism and the Arts Conference*, 1983; ANZART, 1985: the *Feminist Art Seminar*.
10. "In the Red, or, It Helps if You are Dead or Nude." An analysis by gender of articles/reviews and covers in *Art New Zealand*, issues 1–24, 1982, compiled by Elizabeth Eastmond. Statistics cited are from issues 1–10.
11. FAN's proposal for a book on women and art practice was much discussed in 1984. Later the idea for a *Herstory* (New Women's Press, 1987) images diary was raised. After further meetings in 1985 and 1986, the FAN-compiled New Women's Press *Herstory Diary* was published in 1987.
12. FAN published three sets of postcards, in 1984, 1985 and 1986.
13. Juliet Batten worked part-time in General Studies in University of Auckland's School of Engineering and for the Continuing Education Department; Elizabeth Eastmond lectured in University of Auckland's Art History Department; Claudia Pond Eyley worked part-time in the School of Architecture at the University of Auckland; Alexa Johnston was senior curator at Auckland City Art Gallery; Cheryl Sotheran lectured in University of Auckland's Art History Department, in 1985 becoming director of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery; Priscilla Pitts worked in University of Auckland's Art History Department, also later becoming director of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery;
14. A sampling: Juliet Batten curated *Woman to Woman*, 1983, for the Auckland Women Artists' Association and facilitated collaborative works including *The Menstrual Maze*, 1983; Alexa Johnston curated the Artists' Projects programme, including Christine Hellyar, Bronwynne Cornish, Di French, etc. at Auckland City Art Gallery, 1982–86; Carole Shephard curated *Visual Diaries Exhibition* for AWA, 1984; Elizabeth Eastmond and Alexa Johnston curated *Alexis Hunter: Fears/Dreams/Desires* at Auckland Art Gallery, 1988; Juliet Batten lecture series *Women as Artists* from 1980 for Continuing Education, Auckland University, and Elizabeth Eastmond and Cheryl Sotheran started the first paper on women artists in the Art History Department, University of Auckland: *Women and the Arts*, in 1981; Juliet, Claudia, Carole, Elizabeth and Merylyn exhibited work in solo and group exhibitions; Cheryl and later Priscilla were art critics for the *Auckland Star* and both contributed to *Art New Zealand's* "Round the Galleries"; Juliet wrote for *Broadsheet*; Cheryl, Priscilla and Elizabeth wrote for *Art New Zealand*; Priscilla and Elizabeth co-edited *ANTIC*, an arts/literary journal from 1985 on; Elizabeth co-authored, with Merimeri Penfold, *Women and the Arts in New Zealand, 1936–1986*, 1986.
15. This is evidenced in her role in reporting back to the FAN collective on FAN's letter to the Director regarding the *New Image* and *The Grid* shows, which did not include women artists.



Packet of FAN
postcards, second
series, 1985
Feminist Art
Networkers' Archive,
E.H. McCormick
Research Library,
Auckland Art Gallery
Toi o Tamaki

16. The expanded collective included Maureen Lander, Toi Maihi and Puti Rare, among others. Heather McPherson described the *Herstory Diary's* "carefully conscious spectrum from traditional Maori Polynesian Pakeha work to cross-cultural, traditional-contemporary, contemporary radical mixes." *Broadsheet*, (December, 1988), 45-6.
17. At FAN's first meeting, Juliet Batten reported on her recent Arts Council-funded trip to the United States. The FAN mailing list included US artists and writers Judy Chicago, Sherry Buckbrough, Miriam Schapiro, Judith Hoffberg, the Heresies Collective, the Washington Women's Art Centre. On October 26, 1982, Juliet wrote a letter to Dr. Rodney Wilson, Director of the Auckland City Art Gallery proposing an exhibition of Judy Chicago's *Birth Project*, a successor to the *Dinner Party*. Despite the Director's "commitment" to the proposal, it did not receive support from the Art Gallery Directors' Council and the exhibition did not eventuate.
18. Juliet Batten arranged the purchase of this slide-pack, sourced from details provided in K. Peterson and JJ Wilson, *Women Artists: Recognition and Re-appraisal from the Early middle ages to the twentieth century*, New York, 1976, by Auckland University's Continuing Education. It was housed in the Art History Department.
19. Alexis Hunter's role in the feminism/art scene in New Zealand was, however, substantial. She presented talks on feminist art practice in the U.K., including for example Mary Kelly, and on her own work, at the Auckland Artists' Association and elsewhere. FAN produced a video interview with her. Her exhibitions in New Zealand were important – an example: *An Artist Looking for Her Muse*, (Auckland: RKS Galleries, 1984). See E. Eastmond, "The Sake Slid, Some Signifieds Collided – in recent works by Alexis Hunter," *AND/3*, (October 1984), 30-44.
20. Published in *ANTIC* 1, 87-104. Julie Ewington is Head of Australian Art at Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.
21. Lita Barrie, "Remissions: Toward a Deconstruction of Phallic Univocality," *ANTIC* 1, 87-104. Juliet Batten, M. Tweedie and Priscilla Pitts gave papers at the QEII Arts Council's Critics' Symposium, Wellington, January 1986.
22. Juliet Batten, "The Edmonds Cookbook and the Ivory Tower," *ANTIC* 2, 5-17.
23. Juliet Batten, *Airscapes*, 1985; M. Tweedie, *she'll be right*, 1984.
24. December 1, 1988.
25. FAN documentation was presented to the Auckland Art Gallery's Research Library, April 24, 1990. Ron Brownson was then Research Librarian. The FAN archive includes one example of a set of photocopied scrapbooks which were given to each member for her own records, compiled by Claudia Pond Eyley.
26. With thanks to all the FAN members I have been able to contact for this essay, recognising that each of your FAN memories, although generated from the same premise, would, of course, have fanned out differently from mine.

Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki
Staff Research, Presentations And
Publications 2008

Camilla Baskcomb
(Conservator, Works of Art on Paper)

Co-authored with Bryony Joanne James and Rebecca Cameron, "Selected Area XPS Analysis for Identification of Pigment Compounds in Microscopic Paint Flakes," in *Research Letters in Materials Science*, 2008 (2008), Article ID 247053, 4 pages. Published online at <http://www.hindawi.com/GetArticle.aspx?doi=10.1155/2008/247053>

Ron Brownson
(Senior Curator, New Zealand & Pacific Art)

"Three portraits: Rita Angus and her Paintings of Mothers," in *Rita Angus: Life and Vision*, ed. William McAloon and Jill Trevelyan, (Wellington: Te Papa Press, 2008), 67-71.
"The late landscapes of Rita Angus," paper presented at the Rita Angus Symposium, Te Papa Museum of New Zealand, Wellington, October 2008.
Le Folauga – the past coming forward: Contemporary Pacific Art from Aotearoa New Zealand, Kaohsiung: Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts. Exhibition curated by Fuli Pereira and Ron Brownson.
"Le Folauga – the past coming forward: Contemporary Pacific Art from Aotearoa New Zealand," lecture presented at Kaohsiung Museum of Fine Arts, Kaohsiung.
"Laurence Aberhart," lecture presented at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki.
"Museums and the Politics of Culture," lecture presented at Department of Art History, The University of Auckland.
"Joe Sheehan," text for Sao Paulo Biennale (Auckland: Tim Melville Gallery, 2008).
Auckland Art Gallery blog, *Outpost*, articles on John Kinder, Australian holiday photographs, ambrotypes, Henry Frith, Richard Collins, sports photography, Paul Hewson, snapshot photography, Florence Henri, Richard Hamilton, Chris Killip and Graham Smith, at <http://aucklandartgallery.blogspot.com/search/label/Ron%20Brownson>

Rebecca Cameron
(Conservator, Works of Art on Paper)

Co-authored with Bryony Joanne James and Camilla Baskcomb, "Selected Area XPS Analysis for Identification of Pigment Compounds in Microscopic Paint Flakes," in *Research Letters in Materials Science*, 2008 (2008), Article ID 247053, 4 pages. Published online at <http://www.hindawi.com/GetArticle.aspx?doi=10.1155/2008/247053>

Natasha Conland
(Curator, Contemporary Art)

"The Outside In Method," in *Dane Mitchell* (Auckland: Starkwhite, 2008).
"Francis Upritchard," *Art World* no.2 (2008): 52-57.
"Yvonne Todd," *Art World* no.1 (2008): 34-39.
"The Enigmatic Playground: Zidane and Deep Play," in *Reading Room: A Journal of Art and Culture* no. 2 (2008): 46-63.
Co-edited with Wystan Curnow and Christina Barton, *Reading Room: A Journal of Art and Culture* no. 2 (2008). Untitled essay in *Dane Mitchell Invocation* (Melbourne: Gertrude Street, 2008)
"Dane Mitchell: Untitled 2006," in *Brick Bay Sculpture* (Warkworth: Brick Bay Sculpture Trail, 2008): n.p.
"Sriwhana Spong," in *Art World* no.5 (2008): 146-149.
"Record, Scramble, Playback: Notes on the revolution of form ...," in *Biennale of Sydney 2008: Revolutions: Forms that Turn*, ed. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev (Sydney: Biennale of Sydney, 2008): 53-54.
Review *Biennale of Sydney 2008: Revolutions: Forms That Turn 18 June – 7 September* in *Urbis* (September 2008).

Sarah Hillary
(Principal Conservator)

Co-authored with Katherine Campbell, "Colour, Tone, Line & Form: Rita Angus's Technique," in *Rita Angus Life & Vision*, ed. William McAloon and Jill Trevelyan, (Wellington, Te Papa Press, 2008), 205-209.
"The Physical Art of Painting: An Introduction to the Materials and Techniques of Colin McCahon," lecture presented at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, September 6, 2008.

Mary Kisler
(Mackelvie Curator, International Art)

The Agony and the Ecstasy Guido Reni's St Sebastians. Took part in the study day for the exhibition at Dulwich Picture Gallery, London, February 2, 2008.
"The Grand Tour," lecture presented at Central City Library, Auckland, March 10, 2008.
"Wistful women, wine and wombats: art and life among the Pre-Raphaelite Circle," lecture presented at Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, March 19, 2008.
"Painting for the Papacy in 16th and 17th century Rome: Caravaggio, Annibale Carracci and Guido Reni," lecture presented to Auckland Museum Institute and Friends of Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland Museum, April 9, 2008.

"Planning and Process re the Auckland Art Gallery Exhibition, *The Enchanted Garden*," lecture presented to class in Art History, University of Auckland, May 14, 2008.

"A Fearful Joy: The Paradox of Pregnancy in Holbein's *Portrait of Cicely Heron*," lecture presented to Friends of the Gallery, Whare Wananga, Central City Library, Auckland, July 9, 2008.

"Inside the Renaissance House," lecture presented to Friends of the Gallery, Whare Wananga, Central City Library, Auckland, July 23, 2008.

"More Than Just a Meal: The Symbolism of Food in Classical and Renaissance Art," lecture presented to Friends of the Gallery, Whare Wananga, Central City Library, Auckland, August 6, 2008.

"Stitched Stories: The Hidden History of Louise de Kéroualle's Court Dress," lecture presented to Friends of the Gallery, Whare Wananga, Central City Library, Auckland, August 20, 2008.

"Politics, Power and the Sainly Body," lecture presented to Friends of the Gallery, Whare Wananga, Central City Library, Auckland, September 3, 2008.

"Masking the Macabre: Death and Theatre in William Hogarth's prints," lecture presented at the National Library, Wellington, November 11, 2008.

"Women Artists in the Renaissance," lecture presented to Friends of the Gallery, Whare Wananga, Central City Library, Auckland, September 17, 2008.

"Symbolising the Ascetic: The Medievalist Tendency in Rita Angus's Art Practice," paper presented at the Rita Angus Symposium, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, Wellington, September 13, 2008.

"Frances Hodgkins: Colour and Light," lecture presented to Auckland Decorative and Fine Arts Society, Engineering School, Auckland University, October 1, 2008.

"From Tooth to Claw: A History of Animals in Art," lecture presented at Auckland Zoo, October 17, 2008.

"Displaced Legacies: European Art in New Zealand's Public Collections: The Gordon H. Brown Lecture," lecture presented at Victoria University, Wellington, November 20, 2008.

Ngahiraka Mason (Indigenous Curator, Maori Art)

"Tradition and Change: Maori Ways of Knowing," lecture presented at Victoria University, Wellington, January 23, 2008.

Catalogue essays "Turuki Turukil Paneke Paneke!: When Maori Art Became Contemporary," "Katarina Mataira: I o Mahi Kato, mahia. Whatever you do, do well," "Muru Walters: Tuia ki te Here Tangata: Binding people together," "Selwyn Wilson: Ko te pae tawhiti, whāia kia tata, ko te pae tata, whakamaua kia tina: Seek out the distant horizons and cherish those you attain," in *Turuki Turukil Paneke Paneke!: When Maori Art Became Contemporary*, (Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, 2008).

"Curios and Curiosity," lecture presented in *Dateline*, Govett Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, 20 July 2008.

"When Maori Art Became Contemporary," lecture presented to New Zealand Art History Teachers' Association, Gus Fisher Gallery, Auckland, September 27, 2008.

"The Story of the Arawa Canoe," lecture presented in *In Shifting Light*, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, Auckland, November 9, 2008.

"Wrong is an Addictive, Repetitive Story. Right is Where the Movement Is," paper presented at the International Social Anthropologist Conference, *Ownership and Appropriation*, Auckland University, Auckland, December 8, 2008.

Caroline McBride (E.H. McCormick Assistant Librarian)

"From Penny Lane to the Burlington Arcade: A Kiwi's Library Experience in the U.K.," *ARLIS UK & Ireland News-sheet* 196 (2008): 9-10.

Contributors

Christina Barton is co-editor of *Reading Room: A Journal of Art and Culture*. She is an art historian, writer and curator who is currently Director of the Adam Art Gallery, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

Jon Bywater teaches as Programme Leader for Critical Studies at Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, New Zealand. He is a member of the collectives Cuckoo (<http://www.cuckoo.org.nz>) and Local Time (<http://local-time.net>), and is widely published on art and music. He was a co-organiser of the international symposia for practitioners and theorists, *Cultural Provocation: Art, Activism and Social Change* (Auckland, August 2003) and *Cultural Futures: Place, Ground and Practice in Asia Pacific New Media Arts* (Auckland, December 2005). With Danny Butt and Nova Paul he is a co-editor of the collection *Place: Local Knowledge and New Media Practice* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008).

Fiona Connor was born in Auckland in 1981. Since graduating from Elam School of Fine Arts in 2003 she has exhibited extensively throughout New Zealand and more recently in Australia. Recent solo exhibitions include: *Notes on half the page* and *Old Buildings*, at Gambia Castle, Auckland; *Screening Room*, The Physics Room, Christchurch; and *Free Literature*, Window, Auckland.

Wystan Curnow is a Professor of English at the University of Auckland. He has published widely on modern and contemporary art and literature, and has curated many exhibitions. His projects include monographic shows on Colin McCahon (1984) Billy Apple (1991) and Max Gimblett (2004) and books on Imants Tillers (1998), and Stephen Bambury (2001). *Modern Colours* is the latest of his four books of poetry. He is co-editor of *Reading Room: A Journal of Art and Culture*.

Elizabeth Eastmond lectured in Art History at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. She co-authored books on New Zealand women artists and on Frances Hodgkins, and co-edited the arts/literary journal ANTIC. She curated exhibitions on Frances Hodgkins and Alexis Hunter. Currently she runs Tivoli, a bookshop, mini-cinema and art gallery on Waiheke Island in Auckland. Tivoli's most recent exhibition was *Gordon H. Brown: Works from the Fifties Plus*.

Mary Kisler is Mackelvie Curator International Art at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki in Auckland, New Zealand. Her most recent exhibition was *The Enchanted Garden*. Her most recent publications are "Guido Reni – St Sebastian," in *The Agony and the Ecstasy – Guido Reni's St Sebastians*, eds Piero Boccardo and Xavier F Salomon (Silvana Editoriale); and "Agostino Carracci or Lavinia Fontana? The Attribution of *Portrait of a Lady with a Dog* at the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki," *The Journal of New Zealand Art History* 28 (2007). She is currently writing a book on historic European art works in New Zealand public collections.

Lee Weng Choy is an art critic and artistic co-director of The Substation arts centre in Singapore. He is president of the Singapore Section of the International Association of Art Critics, and also serves on the academic advisory board of the Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong.

Adrian Martin is Senior Research Fellow, Film and Television Studies, Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. He is the author of *Qué es el cine moderno?* (Santiago: Uqbar, 2008), *Raúl Ruiz: sublimes obsesiones* (Buenos Aires: Altamira, 2004), *The Mad Max Movies* (Sydney: Currency/ScreenSound, 2003), *Once Upon a Time in America* (London: British Film Institute, 1998) and *Phantasms* (Melbourne: Penguin, 1994). He is the co-editor of *Raúl Ruiz: Images of Passage* (Melbourne: Rouge Press/Rotterdam International Film Festival, 2004), *Movie Mutations* (BFI, 2003) and the Internet film journal *Rouge* (www.rouge.com.au). He has won the Byron Kennedy Award (1994), the Pascall Prize for Creative Writing (1997), and the Mollie Holman Award (2006).

Helena Reckitt is Senior Curator of Programs at The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery in Toronto, Canada. She has previously worked as a curator, education director, talks organiser, and commissioning editor at institutions including the Atlanta Contemporary Art Center, Georgia, the ICA, London, and Routledge, London. Co-editor of *Acting on AIDS: Sex, drugs and politics* (Serpent's Tail, 1997), she is the editor of the sourcebook *Art and Feminism* (Phaidon Press, 2001), which has been translated, in abridged form, into French and Spanish.

Terry Smith FAHA, CIHA, is Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Contemporary Art History and Theory in the Department of the History of Art and Architecture at the University of Pittsburgh. He is also a Visiting Professor in the Faculty of Architecture, University of Sydney. He is the author of a number of books, notably *Making the Modern: Industry, Art and Design in America* (University of Chicago Press, 1993); *Transformations in Australian Art*, volume 1, *The Nineteenth Century: Landscape, Colony and Nation*, volume 2, *The Twentieth Century: Modernism and Aboriginality* (Craftsman House, Sydney, 2002); and *The Architecture of Aftermath* (University of Chicago Press, 2006). He is editor of many others, most recently *Contemporary Art + Philanthropy* (University of NSW Press, 2007), and *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, postmodernity and contemporaneity* (with Nancy Condee and Okwui Enwezor, Duke University Press, 2008). He is working on *What is Contemporary Art?: Contemporaneity*; and *Contemporary Art: World Currents*.

Anthony White is a Lecturer in the School of Culture and Communication at The University of Melbourne, Australia. He has edited two books, *Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera and Mexican Modernism*, and *Jackson Pollock's Blue Poles*, and published journal articles in *October*, *Grey Room* and *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*.

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Contributors Christina Barton, Jon Bywater,
Fiona Connor, Wystan Curnow, Elizabeth Eastmond,
Mary Kisler, Lee Weng Choy, Adrian Martin, Helena
Reckitt, Terry Smith and Anthony White.

Writing on Jane Alexander, Dan Arps, Pedro Costa,
Lucio Fontana, Luis Jacob, Paul Klee, Kieran Lyons,
Daniel Joseph Martinez, Claes Oldenburg, Paulina
Olowska, Donna Ong, Emily Roysdon and more.



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