

**Art As Ecological Communication: An Application of  
Site-Specific Installation Art to Marine Ecosystem  
Degradation**

by

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requirements for the degree of

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## DECLARATION

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## ABSTRACT

This research explores the potential of fine art to communicate ideas and values pertaining to ecological issues, in particular the marine ecosystem. The research is founded upon the historical function of art as a social, educative and, at times, activist cultural force. It investigates the potential of a variety of art modalities to fulfil this historical function. The different modalities comprise sculptural installation, large-scale video-based installation and printmaking. In addition to their diversity in terms of media, the majority of the works produced have been site-specific in character. Though presented in settings of vastly differing kinds, the common denominator of each site is that it provides exposure of the work to a broad public audience. Since the notion of art-as-communication is central to the research, the presentation of works in non-gallery, highly-frequented public contexts is an important objective.

The major influences on the author's ideas and art practice are described in the exegesis. Some influences are of a personal nature, and are advanced within the paradigm of phenomenology, within which experience and subjectivity is privileged. They include childhood experiences, pivotal encounters with works of art (notably with Anish Kapoor's 1988-89 work, *Adam*) and powerful underwater experiences. Other influences include ecophilosophy and environmental thought in general, with the fields of 'deep' ecology, ecological spirituality and the ecologically-grounded art theories of Suzi Gablik prominent.

The research is underpinned by reference to artists for whom an artistic praxis of social change is central. A number of 'public' artists who have utilised art as a socio-political instrument are addressed, including Joseph Beuys, Shirin Neshat, Krzysztof Wodiczko and Jenny Holzer. The ideas of philosopher John Dewey are also considered, particularly his position on the arts' role as a central force within culture: on what Ernst Fischer has described as 'the necessity of art'.

The research presents a concept of 'ecological' art which can be differentiated from 'environmental' art conventionally so-called, the

latter represented by Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson and Christo. Exemplars of the 'ecological' art proposed include Beuys, Andy Goldsworthy, Jill Peck, and Robert Gschwantner.

Each art project has arisen out of partnerships and collaborations forged by the researcher's establishment of strong links with key local, national and international organisations and specific personnel from within the realms of marine science, private industry, local government and the maritime industry.

It is posited that this research has contributed not only to broader public awareness of marine-ecological issues, but also to an enhanced appreciation of the significance of contemporary art – and of the contemporary artist – within the community.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Central Argument and Dissertation Overview

#### Central Argument

The research undertaken during my candidature has been underpinned by my interest in the social function of art. More specifically it has sought to demonstrate the capacity of art and the artist to raise people's ecological consciousness. Within this broad ecological context, my particular concern is that of marine ecosystem degradation.

Fundamental to this research is the proposition that art is a form of communication: what, in Lucy Lippard's words, is 'a view of the arts as communicative exchange'.<sup>1</sup> The communicative modes in which ecological issues are framed usually take the form of mass media products and academic publications<sup>2</sup>. My interest is to explore the potential of art – a less conventional medium – to communicate as effectively on ecological issues, and on the subject of aquatic degradation specifically as do these other modes<sup>3</sup>.

A second proposition that forms part of my central argument is that art can highlight and provide insight into important social

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<sup>1</sup> Lippard, L. (1984), 'Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power', in B. Wallis [ed.], *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, p342.

<sup>2</sup> These include professional journals, pamphlets, brochures, videos, magazine and newspaper articles and radio and television exposure.

<sup>3</sup> I am not presuming that there is a universal agreement and understanding of communication within art practice. But I do hypothesise that art can effectively serve political ends without descending into propaganda. I will be arguing that communication can involve more than the input of factual data and it is here that the visual language of art becomes potentially useful. Affective response to a work of art – 'aesthetic experience', or sensory experience which is 'above' ordinary experience – establishes in an audience a fundamental condition for communication. This view of art as a language of communication is developed at length in Chapter 2.

issues, while a third proposition is that art has the capacity to influence broad social values. Mine is a praxis that anticipates social change in the wake of changes effected in the realm of individual values.

A fourth proposition essential to my argument is that partnerships and collaborations between artists working in different modes, and between artists and scientists, decision-makers and ecological thinkers, can provide the synergies that will most effectively deliver the change-potential of art. My research arises from the premise that a collaborative approach between science and art has the capacity to realise works of art which not only possess aesthetic merit, but which also provide persuasive interpretive models that can be used to promote more ecologically sound practices in respect of the marine ecosystem. Since the project's inception I have established partnerships with key interest-groups from industry, science, statutory bodies and the broad community. Partnerships have been forged not only within Tasmania but also nationally and internationally. Such partnerships have sought to develop the concept of an 'ecological art' as a means of communicating ecological themes within the public domain.

A fifth proposition central to my argument is that new electronic art media have particular potential in regard to the communicative role of art and the intersectoral collaboration described above. I believe that 'new media' or 'multimedia' art has a unique and potentially revolutionary capacity to bring art into the ambit of a wider public. Whilst my various works have been produced within a variety of media, a major aim of the research as a whole has been to investigate, in particular, the potential of multimedia and the exciting possibilities arising from large-scale projection, with its inherent capacity to reach large audiences. Taking a cue from Marshall McLuhan's dictum that

‘the medium is the message’<sup>4</sup>, multimedia possesses an inherent capacity to transform the place of art in society. In the process, I believe, it has the potential also to influence attitudinal change in respect of social and environmental issues. The belief that art can realise the social and environmental goals described above is underpinned by a concomitant belief in the significance of the aesthetic dimension of human experience. In my research, I am particularly interested in the aesthetic factor as a fundamental condition for effecting artistic communication. In a democratic society, social change arises out of the adoption of new values and occurs not only through the input of objective knowledge but also by the internalisation of ‘feelings’. The aesthetic response, or ‘feeling’, that a work of art engenders in an audience establishes a fundamental condition for the communication of its message. Aesthetic experience may be defined as ‘experience above the ordinary’ or ‘heightened awareness’. Whilst its occurrence takes the form of subjective response, it has been argued that the object which has inspired aesthetic experience would in fact have derived from the perceiving subject’s *objectively* acquired knowledge.<sup>5</sup> As such, aesthetic experience may be seen as the product both of the senses *and* the intellect. Robert Witkin encapsulates this seemingly paradoxical duality with his concept, ‘the intelligence of feeling’.<sup>6</sup> Thus a sixth proposition within my central argument is that art is a unique way of knowing, and that, as such, it constitutes a special way of perceiving, conceptualising, organising and representing experience and phenomena.

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<sup>4</sup> McLuhan, M. (1964), *Understanding Media*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, New York.

<sup>5</sup> Best, D. (1980), ‘Objectivity in Artistic Appreciation’ in J. Condous, J. Howlett, J. Skull, [eds.], *Arts in Cultural Diversity*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Sydney, p13-17.

<sup>6</sup> Witkin, R. (1974), *The Intelligence of Feeling*, Heinemann Educational, London.

This also has implications for the processes involved in art-making and the role of the artist. From the perspective of my research, the artist would serve as a creative interlocutor within collaborative groupings. This is the seventh proposition that constitutes my central argument. In one sense it may be seen as a movement away from the socially isolated constructs of art practice and a return to a more socially integrated, even activist role that the artist has, historically, often played. Artists have challenged, celebrated, educated and given pleasure to their respective communities. I concur with John Dewey's lamenting of 'theories which isolate art and its appreciation by placing them in a realm of their own, disconnected from other modes of experiencing'<sup>7</sup>, and with the Marxist philosopher, Walter Benjamin, who also criticised the conception of art as a self-referential, specialised pursuit radically distinct from other human activities.<sup>8</sup>

I have come to identify with a form of art that may be termed 'ecological art', by which I mean a dimension of public art that seeks to contribute to the restoration and preservation of biophysical integrity. I distinguish my art from the more commonly designated 'environmental art' because I do not necessarily use 'the environment' itself as a site – or 'canvas' – for my art works. Coming from a specifically *ecological* perspective makes one critical of some of the more ecologically intrusive artworks that have been produced under the banner of environmental art. A concern for ecology signifies a way of viewing the world and an identification of particular world problems. As such, 'ecology' has provided a meaningful framework within which my research propositions have been applied.

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<sup>7</sup> Dewey, J. (1958), *Art As Experience*, Capricorn, New York, p10.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin, W. (1977), *Understanding Brecht*. NLB, London, p86.

In 1997, I read *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology*, a major work of ecophilosophy by Warwick Fox. For Fox, an ecologically-inspired philosophy is a *lived* philosophy. Its essence is not to be found in abstraction but in the relationships found within life on earth. It is a view of ecological interconnection that grounds the receptive subject within an overarching conceptual framework of interconnectedness. I surmise that an ecological viewpoint is one which privileges the subjectivity of embodiment over disembodied rationality. The priority of the feeling that is the essence of subjectivity is presumed.

In adopting this view of subjectivity, Fox and other ecophilosophers place themselves within the phenomenological tradition. So do I, as I proceed from an innate feeling for ecological processes, an emotional standpoint that has variously been called an 'ecological conscience', an 'ecological impulse' or, my preferred designation, an 'ecological imperative'. In artistic terms, I will argue, this describes aesthetic experience.

In the following chapter I describe the major influences on my art ideas and practice. The discussion starts from the assumption that feelings and impulses of a subjective, non-rational nature are more significant in the experience of art than are relatively objectified processes which may be seen to rest on 'logical' foundations, such as perceiving the representation of appearances, or functional design. My approach – based upon the privileging of experience and subjectivity – is consistent with that of phenomenology. The phenomenological method underpins all that follows.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the twentieth century philosopher who, along with Martin Heidegger, has done most to establish the epistemological credentials of phenomenology, has written:

Phenomenology is the study of essences; and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences: the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness, for example. But phenomenology is also a philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man [*sic*] and the world from any starting point other than that of their 'facticity'. It is... a philosophy for which the world is 'already there' before reflection begins – as an inalienable presence; and all its efforts are concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status... [it] offers an account of space, time and the world as we 'live' them. It tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of... the causal explanations which the scientist, historian or the sociologist may be able to provide.<sup>9</sup>

Phenomenology is the preferred epistemology of many scholars seeking to make sense of ecological problems.<sup>10</sup> This is not surprising, because phenomenology's stress upon the realness of the world and the possibility of direct mediation with it, privileges bodily sensation over cognition. As the phenomenologically-inspired ecophilosopher, David Abram, writes: 'Merleau-Ponty invites us to recognize, at the heart of even our most abstract cogitations, the sensuous and sentient life of the body itself'.<sup>11</sup> Abram argues that 'the event of perception unfolds as a reciprocal exchange between the living body and the animate world that surrounds it'.<sup>12</sup> Such a theory of perception is in keeping with 'the animistic or participatory mode of experience known to all native, place-based culture'<sup>13</sup>, and, therefore:

the coherence of human language is inseparable from the coherence of the surrounding ecology, from the expressive vitality of the more-than-human terrain. It is the animate earth

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<sup>9</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962), *Phenomenology of Perception*, C. Smith (trans.), Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, ppviii-ix.

<sup>10</sup> On this see Hay, P. (2002), *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, Australia, pp142-145, 150-151.

<sup>11</sup> Abram, D. (1996), *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, Random House, New York, p45.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p73.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p137.

that speaks; human speech is but a part of that vaster discourse.<sup>14</sup>

It is a central premise of my research that art, too, is ‘but a part of that vaster discourse.’ John Robert Livingston, has argued the same on behalf of music, claiming, in fact, that music is the primary ‘ecological’ art.<sup>15</sup>

For some, phenomenology and science are irreconcilable epistemologies. I take the view, however, that they are equally authoritative – but simply different – ways of perceiving and understanding. In my opinion the fullest ‘truths’ are realised when different epistemological approaches are brought to bear upon the same problem. This forms an important theme in the exegesis. However, my concern has not been to establish the legitimacy of scientific or other cognition-based ecological explanations. They already possess substantial currency. My concern has rather been to establish the legitimacy of the language of the visual arts as an effective form of ecological communication.

### **Profile of the Dissertation**

In keeping with the nature of phenomenological investigation, I describe within the exegesis facets of my own personal experiences. These, I believe, have constituted important formative factors in the development of my own ecological consciousness and ultimately, my consequent artistic orientation. Chapter 1 describes some key factors within my childhood and my later experiences within the natural environment, especially below the surface of the ocean, experiences which have been crucial to the shaping of my

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p179.

artistic praxis. I also detail in this chapter influences of a non-subjective kind – of marine science and marine policy formation, for example – the personal significance of which derives directly from my subjective engagement with the marine environment.<sup>16</sup>

In Chapter 2, 'Art, Values and Social Change', I consider the work and practice of theorists and artists who, from their various perspectives, have proclaimed art to be essentially 'public' or 'social' in its function. In this I conceive art in what John Dewey<sup>17</sup> regarded as its critical role, one of full embodiment in the life of its community. The nature of art as a virtual language, also articulated by John Dewey, is discussed, along with the fundamental question of what *counts* as art. The writings of the sociologists, Janet Wolff<sup>18</sup> and A.W. Foster and J.R. Blau<sup>19</sup>, the anthropologist, Arnold Rubin<sup>20</sup>, and the art theorist, Suzi Gablik<sup>21</sup>, are brought to bear on this question. These theorists encourage broadened conceptions as to what counts as art, as a consequence of which I have considered new directions or at least alternative functions or 'uses' of art in society.

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<sup>15</sup> Livingston, J.R. (1999), 'Phenomenology, Music, Nature', Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Tasmania, Hobart (Tas.).

<sup>16</sup> Other influences, those that are more specific to developments within art theory and practice, are considered in Chapter 2.

<sup>17</sup> Dewey, J. (1958), *Art as Experience*, Capricorn, New York.

<sup>18</sup> Wolff, J. (1981), *The Social Production of Art*, Macmillan, London.

<sup>19</sup> Foster, A.W. and Blau, J.R. (1989) 'Introduction' in A.W. Foster and J.R. Blau (eds.), *Art and Society: Readings in the Sociology of the Arts*, State University of the New York Press, Albany (NY). pp3-27.

<sup>20</sup> Rubin, A. (1979), 'Anthropology and the Study of Art in Contemporary Western Society: The Pasadena Tournament of Roses', in J. Cordwell (ed.), *The Visual Arts Visual and Graphic*, Mouton Publishers, The Hague, pp669-715.

<sup>21</sup> Gablik, S. (1991), *The Reenchantment of Art*, Thames and Hudson, New York.



Also in Chapter 2, I explore the role that art can play in communicating ideas that may lead to social change. Here, in addition to Dewey, I use the writing of Ernst Fischer<sup>22</sup>, Gyorgy Lukacs<sup>23</sup>, Herbert Marcuse<sup>24</sup>, and Paul Hirst<sup>25</sup>. Marcuse refers to the significance of aesthetic experience<sup>26</sup> in art as being essential for the well-being of the individual and society. Even in the 'pure' dimension of aesthetics, Marcuse conceives art to be essentially public in nature and function. The role of aesthetic experience as it pertains to an artistic aspiration of social change will be explored in this chapter.

Finally, Chapter 2 looks at the work of artists who, in fact, deploy their art as vehicles for social change. In particular, I detail the work of such artists who utilise multimedia as both an artistic and a socio-political instrument: namely, Joseph Beuys, Jenny Holzer, Shirin Neshat and Krzysztof Wodiczko. Holzer uses multimedia as a vehicle for social critique; Neshat's multi-screen video projections highlight gender inequalities, particularly in respect of her homeland of Iran, while those of Wodiczko transform buildings into powerful public political statements. These artists have generated strong public support for their respective causes through creative and skilful use of new art media.

The third chapter, 'Art and Ecology', begins with a description of Gablik's work, in this case, of her specifically ecological

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<sup>22</sup> Fischer, E. (1963), *The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach*, Penguin, Harmondsworth (Eng.).

<sup>23</sup> Kiralyfalvi, B. (1975), *The Aesthetics of Gyorgy Lukacs*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ).

<sup>24</sup> Marcuse, H. (1978), *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, Macmillan, London.

<sup>25</sup> Hirst, P. (1974), *Knowledge and the Curriculum: A Collection of Philosophical Papers*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.

ideas. I also consider the ecophilosophers and other theorists of the environment movement whose writings have given impetus and direction to my thought and art. They provide the philosophical underpinning that has merged with the impulses from my personal history, as described in Chapter 1, and the influences from art and art theory, as described in Chapter 2.

Phenomenological theory is considered here in greater depth, though with the focus less on the thought of Merleau-Ponty and more on the 'grounded', more obviously 'ecological' phenomenology of Martin Heidegger and David Abram. Here too, I critically assess the notion of an 'ecological impulse', as advanced by Peter Hay<sup>27</sup>, and I consider the work of the phenomenologically inspired deep ecologists, notably Arne Naess<sup>28</sup> and Warwick Fox<sup>29</sup>. I have also read in the area of the fusion of science with ecological spirituality, in particular the work of the American theorist, Fritjof Capra<sup>30</sup>, and the Jungian ecological spirituality of the Australian, David Tacey<sup>31</sup>. Charlene Spretnak<sup>32</sup> provides a link back into the world of art, the nature and function of art being one of her main concerns.

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<sup>26</sup> 'Aesthetic' comes from the Greek word *aesthetikos*. I refer here to a 'heightened sensory experience' rather than the form of philosophy dealing with art and its forms and effects.

<sup>27</sup> *Op.cit.*, ppl-25.

<sup>28</sup> Naess, A. (1973), 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary', *Inquiry*, 16, pp95-100; Naess, A. (1984), 'Intuition, Intrinsic Value and Deep Ecology', *The Ecologist*, 14, pp201-203.

<sup>29</sup> Fox, W. (1990), *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology; Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism*, Shambhala, Boston (Mass.). Fox's book is of particular importance in my personal history. Having read it on the recommendation of a friend in 1997, it opened up a world of ideas and inspiration that gave new direction to my art.

<sup>30</sup> Capra, F. (1992), *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism*, Flamingo, London; Capra, F. (1997), *The Web of Life*, Flamingo, London.

<sup>31</sup> Tacey, D. (1995), *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia* HarperCollins, Blackburn, (Vic.).

<sup>32</sup> Spretnak, C. (1997), *The Resurgence of the Real: Body, Nature, and Place in a Hypermodern World*, Addison-Wesley, Reading (Mass.).

Chapter 4 provides a consideration of ‘ecology’ in ‘ecological art’. I critique what I believe to be the inauthentic ascription of ‘ecological’ intensions in respect of much art that proclaims itself to be ‘environmental art’. For much ‘environmental art’ so-called imposes itself permanently – and negatively – upon actual ecological processes. It leaves an unacceptably large ‘ecological footprint’. I wish to avoid such contradictions in my own ‘ecological art’. As exemplars of what might be achieved through the practice of an ecologically-motivated public art, I consider, in this chapter, the work of Joseph Beuys (this time in its specifically ecological dimensions), Andy Goldsworthy, Jill Peck, Robert Gschwantner, and the collaboration that won the 1999 Governor of Osaka Prefecture Prize.

The fifth chapter of the dissertation, ‘My Art Project and its Component Artworks’, details the physical outcomes of my research - exhibitions, installations, events and projections. These have been outlined chronologically. My multimedia art has been designed so as to be demountable and, though I prefer to work in non-gallery situations, it is also adaptable to gallery venues where circumstances demand. All my art projects have involved collaborative synergies, variously with artists working in different modes, scientists, academics from other disciplines, members of statutory bodies, and personnel from industry. Each of my art projects is discussed in relative detail. Attention is particularly given to the nature of the collaborations – how these have been forged, the expectations of the partners, what problems have occurred, whether expectations have been met, how appropriate to project goals have been the artistic modes used, and the potential of such collaborations for future projects.

The exegesis concludes with an assessment of the degree to which the research goals have been realised and an outline of the direction which I expect my work to take as a consequence of lessons learned and discoveries made in this research.

## CHAPTER 1

### Background Influences

When I was a child in Tasmania my father ‘tilled the soil’ after the fashion of his own father, a Chinese immigrant who, I imagine, established a loving relationship with the soil in the traditional way as a means of making contact with a new and strange place. I trace back my empathy with the living world to my memories of working with my father. From him I acquired ‘the soul-nurturing tangibility of gardening’<sup>1</sup>. My mother, an Englishwoman from Somerset, deeply empathised with The Garden. She was a creator of aesthetic spaces and from her intimate garden sensibility I understood the depths to which it is possible to form attachments to place.

In considering the impulse behind my parents’ gardening activities, I am convinced that they were not indulging purely private dreams. I think instead that their impulse was primarily social. In the case of my mother it was to create beauty to be enjoyed by others, whilst for my father, it was the garden’s usefulness as a source – and a symbol – of life-sustenance that drove his endeavours. It was a socialist household in which I grew up and the principle of giving first priority to the needs of fellow human beings was accepted by me at an early age. My upbringing was also characterised by an ethos of social activism and probably explains the social focus of my art.

From the interplay of my bi-racial background I can identify a spirituality which seems to have been a constant presence. Perhaps from my Chinese background I have adopted the Taoist view of the universe as ‘the same as’ or ‘inseparable from’ ourselves. The Tao, described by Allan Watts as ‘the flowing

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<sup>1</sup> Hay, P. (2001), ‘Dinoflagellates and Art: Jane Quon’s Marine Installations’, *Artlink*, 21 (1), pp19-21.

course of nature'<sup>2</sup>, has surfaced in my art through the metaphor of water.

In my last years at school, I became a passionate bushwalker. My ventures into the Tasmanian wilderness at that time gave full expression to the values instilled in childhood regarding empathy with nature. But subsequent experiences in the Tasmanian bush, far from reinforcing my earlier perceptions of its idyllic state, in fact provided new perceptions which alarmed me intensely. My earlier view of the world – specifically of the Tasmanian wilderness – was shattered when, during the early 1990s, I worked as a seed gatherer in tree-felling operations for the Forestry Commission (now Forestry Tasmania) near Wayatinah. I still feel ambivalent about the experience. While I must confess to having felt a sense of awe when confronted by the drama of a large tree's fall, the feeling was accompanied afterwards by an overriding sense of despair at the devastation. This despair, and the realisation that I was witnessing a mere microcosm of a universal practice, raised grave concerns on my part at the catastrophic consequences of human actions of various kinds upon the ecosystem as a whole.

My attention then turned to the environment underwater. Prior to my seed gathering work, I had taken up scuba diving. This gave me access to a new world of extraordinary beauty and wonder. My sensations under the water matched in their intensity those responses to the Tasmanian wilderness which I had experienced during my bushwalking days of the late 1960s. The new underwater world which I discovered in 1991, however, contrasted dramatically with the 'Tasmanian wilderness' which I was concurrently experiencing in the logging coupes. I felt somehow a party to the destruction of that changing environment.

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<sup>2</sup> Watts, A. (1975), *TAO: The Watercourse Way*, Pantheon, New York, p49.

I began operating a dive and fishing charter business out of the port of Triabunna and around Maria Island on Tasmania's East Coast. The intense experience of life below the water's surface heightened my regard for the marine environment and my concern for its future.

It is my artistic goal that, through manipulation of medium and content, my work may facilitate a 'movement of the mind' with regard to an ecological consciousness. Such an intangible sense of movement might itself seem almost tidal, the mind of the viewer paralleling my underwater sensations of constantly moving in and out of space and spacelessness, of weight and weightlessness, of pleasure and fear.

Gaston Bachelard has written:

by changing space, by leaving the space of one's usual sensibilities, one enters into communication with a space that is physically invigorating. "Neither in the desert nor on the bottom of the sea does one's spirit remain sealed and invisible." This change of concrete space can no longer be a mere mental operation that could be compared with consciousness of geometrical relativity. For we do not change place, we change our nature...by changing space, by leaving the space of one's usual sensitivities, one enters into a communication with a space that is psychically innovating<sup>3</sup>.

This encapsulates my own experience when diving at 40 metres below the surface of Mercury Passage. Bachelard and Diolé<sup>4</sup> are describing an experience of the sublime, an experience, they argue, more easily found in the deep sea (and the desert) than in everyday human spaces.

My experience beneath the surface of the water convinces me that Bachelard and Diolé are correct when they assert that under the water sublime experiences can occur time and time again. As

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<sup>3</sup> Bachelard, G. (1964), *The Poetics of Space*, Beacon, Boston (Mass.), p206.

the eighteenth century philosopher, Immanuel Kant, observed: 'The sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of limitlessness, yet with a super-added thought of its totality.'<sup>5</sup> Reading Kant's words, it is hard to believe that he too had not experienced the world deep below the ocean's surface.

Deep-diving in Mercury Passage I experience a heightened sense of space at the same time, paradoxically, that I experience a feeling of spacelessness. Most diving accidents, according to the American author, Barry Lopez, 'happen at the mysterious surface, a wafer-thin realm where air bounds water, where light suddenly changes flux, ambient sound changes register, and the body passes through a membrane fraught with possibility.'<sup>6</sup> On first entering the water I am acutely conscious of my bodily reactions: intuitive responses triggered to optimise my chances of survival. But as I descend, this enhanced bodily consciousness is supplanted by an awareness of the world outside the self, of the boundless void around me. Yet, despite this sense of vast space my actual vision is restricted, both peripherally by my mask, and by the limited range afforded by the underwater situation. A feeling of spacelessness and confinement coexist.

Corresponding to this spatial ambiguity is an ambiguity concerning weight. There is an elated sense of weightlessness, of buoyancy, of there being no bottom and no top. It is a sense of perfect equilibrium. However, there is a great pressure of water

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<sup>4</sup> The quote within the quote is by Philippe Diolé, upon whom Bachelard draws.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Thomson, J. (1999), 'The Sublime Moment: The Rise of the "Critical Watchman"', in *Sublime: The Darkness and the Light, Works from the Arts Council Collection*, South Bank Centre, London, pp22-23.

<sup>6</sup> Lopez, B. (1998), *About this Life: Journeys on the Threshold of Memory*, Harvill, London, pp27-28.



upon me, and my awareness of this physical pressure fluctuates. One can spend a maximum of only five minutes at a depth of forty metres. Regulations specify decompression stops while surfacing. These provide 5-10 minutes of hanging weightless, surrounded at depth by a dense velvet opacity, and closer to the surface by a brilliant blue light flickering above. Again one experiences the paradoxical coexistence of an extreme weight of pressure and a liberating sense of weightlessness.

Ambiguities within the external sensations of space and weight are accompanied by internal oscillations between pleasure and fear. For me, the underwater world remains, basically, a world of unfamiliarity. Nothing in my experience of it provides a correspondence with the more familiar world above. The experience is enhanced by the oxygen 'high' which one may experience while deep diving. I move from an unawareness of my body to an acute awareness of it. On the descent the sensation is almost claustrophobic, though it becomes less so on the bottom. The more clouded the water is - at all depths - the more life it contains. Clouded water thus can be a source of profound engagement with the living world. I feel amphibian, privileged to be in other creatures' worlds. Yet the same awareness - and this within an environment with such low visibility - makes me cognisant of the fact that some of this life is dangerous. Such fluctuating responses, between pleasure and fear, are also described by Lopez:

something, most certainly, happens to a diver's emotions underwater. It is not merely a side effect of the pleasing, vaguely erotic sensation of water pressure on the body... It is some complicated run of emotions, together with the constant proximity of real terror, exhilaration of another sort entirely.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p27.

These experiences seem to me now to have been the major determinants of the content of my art, and of the role that I should play as an artist.

Yet, whilst experiences that can be interpreted as 'sublime' motivate the direction and focus of my art, I am not seeking to *create* or *remake* the sublime in my art. I make a fundamental distinction between the attempt through art to render descriptions of a specific sublime experience *per se* and 'an attempt to insinuate oneself into the world to work with given phenomena in order to elicit meanings and evoke significance'.<sup>8</sup> Urging a particular mode of interaction with 'the phenomenal world', J.R. Livingston writes:

Allow your shell of self-interest to become permeable, let the concerns and interests of others interpenetrate... Extend a hand and discover significance! Accept the proffered invitation and reap the experiential reward!<sup>9</sup>

In Livingston's formulation the experiencing subject is a co-creator of the experience. The experiences within art which have most closely paralleled my experiences within the underwater world (in the sense of 'experiential reward' rather than 'sublime experience') have stemmed from personal encounters with the sculptural works of Anish Kapoor.

My experience of Kapoor's *Adam* (1988-89), which I saw – or rather profoundly experienced – at the Tate Modern in London in 2000, fitted Livingston's categorisation of the 'experiential reward'. This experience was one of a heightened desire physically to engage; to change the way I saw and felt. It was an activist impulse; in essence, aesthetic rather than sublime. Kapoor activated for me a desire to put my hand into the void in his sculpture and by doing so to experience a oneness with it. The

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<sup>8</sup> Livingston, J.R. (1999), 'Phenomenology, Music, Nature', Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Tasmania, Hobart (Tas.). p23.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

experience, in other words, drove my action. I seek in my own art to draw people into an experience of nature that elicits a similar active response.



Figure 1.

**Anish Kapoor**  
*Adam*, 1988-89  
Sandstone and pigment  
119x102x236cm  
Tate Gallery, London

Kapoor is a sculptor whose work evokes a unique sensation of space and emptiness. This is epitomised in *Adam*. He has written: 'I have always been drawn to a notion of fear, to a notion of vertigo, of falling, of being pulled inwards'<sup>10</sup>. This is a statement which could be describing aspects of my own below-water experience. Kapoor's work has been described by Simon Bolitho thus:

In *Adam*, Kapoor creates an area of pure darkness in a flat face of pinkish sandstone. It is an unsettling work, partly because it is unclear what we are looking at. How deep does the hollow extend? Is it really a three-dimensional space, or a surface of impossibly black paint? While for some the void may suggest nihilistic absence, for the artist it signifies potential. It might represent the womb, or the moment just before the creation of the universe.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Bolitho, S. (2000), 'Ghost 1977, Adam 1988-9', in J. Burton (ed.), *Between Cinema and a Hard Place*, exhibition catalogue, Tate Modern, London, p14.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

I was drawn to its ‘impossibly black’ rectangular void. The piece drew me viscerally and spiritually into it. It is a work which must be experienced directly in order to derive any sense of its strange ‘pull’. A catalogue photograph is but a lame souvenir. Yet in experiencing the work, I found it incomprehensible: I was projecting my hand into a space which was unfathomable and seemingly boundless – akin to being underwater. I felt that I had become as one with the piece, merging with its essence and, as Bachelard suggests, entering ‘into a communication with a space that is psychically innovating.’

My project, however, ranges beyond an attempt to evoke the aesthetics of the underwater world. For along with the heightened aesthetic experience of being in the ocean, I simultaneously become aware, when diving, of the serious degradation of that environment. I become aware, in fact, that degradation is as much a characteristic of the marine world as it is of the terrestrial world above. This awareness has not only formed the impetus for my art practice. It has, in turn, and as an integral part of my art practice, taken me into the domains of philosophy and science – and into such prosaic fields as public environmental policy. Later in my exegesis I will examine artistic and philosophical influences upon my work. Here, though, I will confine my discussion to the apparently ‘non-artistic’ scientific, environmental and public policy influences upon my project.

Through my own diving and fishing experiences in and around Mercury Passage, I have perceived a need to respond to the issue of the introduction of marine organisms into alien aquatic environments. In recent years at least 170 species of exotic marine organisms have been translocated into Australian waters, with significant implications for Australia’s burgeoning marine-

farming industry and for marine tourism.<sup>12</sup> Whilst not all are dangerous, some marine organisms also pose a risk to humans. Observations have shown an apparent global increase in the frequency, intensity and geographic distribution of paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP), an illness with fifteen percent mortality resulting from the consumption of shellfish products contaminated with alkaloid toxins from eleven species of plankton dinoflagellates.<sup>13</sup> Thus 'there is increasing concern in recent years, in Australia and internationally, at the real and potential impacts from introduced marine pests translocated by ships.'<sup>14</sup>

With 12,000 islands within its territories and a coastline of 30,000 kilometres<sup>15</sup>, Australia relies heavily on the shipping trade. Over 11,000 vessels visit Australia each year from over 600 overseas locations, arriving at 65 ports around the country:

...there is now no question that shipping is essential to Australia and ballast water is essential to shipping. Ships take on ballast water to keep them stable and allow them to operate efficiently

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<sup>12</sup> Walters, S.(1996), *Ballast Water, Hull Fouling and Exotic Marine Organism Introductions via Ships – A Victorian Study*, Environmental Protection Authority, Victoria. Australia, p3: 'Sea going vessels pose a risk of introducing exotic species from overseas, of transferring exotic species from one domestic port to another, and of moving indigenous species from one Australian location to another. The introduction of marine organisms into Australian waters threatens ecological communities and the integrity of the natural environment, health, aquaculture, tourism and enjoyment of coastal amenity.'

<sup>13</sup> Hallegraeff, G. (1998), *Transport of Toxic Dinoflagellates via Ships' Ballast Water*. Marine Ecology Progress Series, Vol.168: 297-309, p297. PSP in the Australian region was unknown until the late 1980s when the first toxic dinoflagellate blooms appeared in the ports of Hobart, Melbourne and Adelaide. Explanations for this apparent global increase include an increase in scientific awareness and, hence, an increase in identification of problems, and stimulation of dinoflagellate blooms by increased coastal eutrophication. In a limited number of cases, translocation of non-indigenous estuarine dinoflagellate species across oceanic boundaries either via ships' ballast water or translocation of shellfish products, appears more probable.

<sup>14</sup> Paterson, D. (1999), *The Ballast Water Problem – Where to from Here?* Eco-Ports Monograph series No.19, Ports Corporation Queensland, Brisbane, p7.

<sup>15</sup> Author unknown. (1998), *Facts About Australia's Ocean*, CSIRO Marine Research, Hobart, (Tas.), p1.

and safely during voyages when they have little or no cargo on board.<sup>16</sup>

Australia is one of the world's largest importers of ballast water, of which, it is estimated, 10 billion tonnes are carried around the globe each year.<sup>17</sup>

International action in response to ballast dumping practices occurs principally through the activities of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and its Marine Environmental Protection Committee (MEPC).<sup>18</sup> MEPC has, over the last ten years, been working toward mandatory regulations – through discussions and research largely led by Australia – in an internationally binding agreement on the management of ballast water applicable to countries concerned with ballast dumping.<sup>19</sup> However, implementation of international treaties remains a slow process.<sup>20</sup> Public education, both formal and non-formal, therefore, is considered 'critical for achieving environmental and ethical awareness, values and attitudes, skills and behaviour consistent with sustainable development and for effective public

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<sup>16</sup> Paterson, *op cit*, p7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p7. Current research on practical measures of control for preventing the introduction of unwanted organisms and pathogens from ship's ballast water are: chemical treatment of ballast water, oxygen deprivation, tank coating and changes to ships design.

<sup>18</sup> The International Maritime Organisation is a specialised agency of the United Nations, and is responsible for measures to improve maritime safety, improve the level of safety of international shipping and to prevent marine pollution from ships. It was established via the Geneva Convention in 1948, and is made up of 157 member states, meeting every two years.

<sup>19</sup> International Maritime Organisation. (1998), *Alien Invaders - Putting a Stop to the Ballast Water Hitch-hikers*, IMO Issues Document, Oct., IMO, London.

<sup>20</sup> The normal procedure for adopting amendments to an international treaty is by means of 'explicit acceptance'. This means that the amendments enter into force so many months after being accepted by a specified number of Parties to the original Convention. The tacit acceptance procedure means that amendments – which are nearly always adopted unanimously – enter into force on a set date unless they are specifically rejected by a specified number of countries.

International Maritime Organisation, 'Why is the IMO so Slow?' <http://www.imo.org>

participation in decision-making.<sup>21</sup> It is also critical that international strategies are complemented by national and locally specific remediation regimes. Marine biologist, Gustaaf Hallegraeff, maintains that the taking up of water into ships' ballast during seasonal plankton blooms in Korea and Japan<sup>22</sup> '...is a plausible explanation' for the introduction and establishment of the toxic dinoflagellates now found within Tasmania's Derwent Estuary.<sup>23</sup>

My growing concern in relation to this issue has spilled over in very significant ways into my art. Locally, I have established art-science collaborations with Dr. Hallegraeff, and internationally with the IMO and MEPC. In these collaborations, and in other projects, I have attempted to raise awareness within the wider community as well as within international shipping circles, of the issue of ballast water dumping as a major environmental problem. However, it has become increasingly apparent that this issue cannot be seen in isolation, for the problem exists within both a larger marine ecology context and a larger environmental policy context. Two policy documents have had a particular influence upon my perception of the issue: one global in scope, the other national.

In terms of global policy, the key framework is that set up at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Here the key policy document is *Agenda 21*, the opening statement of which proclaims:

Humanity stands at a defining moment in history. We are confronted with a perpetuation of disparities between and within nations, a worsening of poverty, hunger, ill-health and

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<sup>21</sup> Agenda 21, Chapter 36.3:

<http://www.icg.apc.org/habitat/agenda21/ch-36.html>

<sup>22</sup> Hallegraeff, *op cit*, p297.

<sup>23</sup> *Asterias amurensis* [Northern Pacific Seastar], *Carcinus maenas* [European Shore Crab] *Undaria pinnatifida* [Japanese kelp] have been translocated within Tasmania after being introduced via fouling of ships hulls or through ballast dumping.

illiteracy, and the continuing deterioration of the ecosystems on which we depend for our well-being. However integration of environment and development concerns and greater attention to them will lead to the fulfilment of basic needs, improved living standards for all, better protected and managed ecosystems and a safer, and more prosperous future. No nation can achieve this on its own; but together we can – in global partnership for sustainable development<sup>24</sup>.

*Agenda 21* is a charter which contains an internationally recognised framework of objectives and actions for implementing the principles contained within the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. It is a dynamic program which calls upon governments to adopt national strategies for sustainable development through wide participation, involving non-government organisations and the public.<sup>25</sup> The document also calls for creative multidisciplinary methods for achieving its ends. ‘Formal and non-formal’ methods should be employed to make this communication effective.<sup>26</sup> *Agenda 21* has had a considerable impact upon my thinking and my art practice, particularly in its advocacy of global partnerships and of non-formal communication as important devices in the battle against global ecological degradation.

In terms of Australia’s marine environment specifically, issues concerning sustainable development have been highlighted by the Australian Government in publications such as *Australia’s Ocean Policy*<sup>27</sup>. Management of oceans within Australia is based on principles which integrate scientific knowledge of ecological processes with economic, environmental, social, cultural and other factors.

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<sup>24</sup> Agenda 21, Chapter 1.1.1:

<http://www.igc.apc.org/habitat/agenda21/ch-01.html>

<sup>25</sup> Agenda 21, Chapter 1 Preamble:

<http://www.igc.apc.org/habitat/agenda21/ch-01.html>

<sup>26</sup> Agenda 21, Chapter 36:

<http://www.igc.apc.org/habitat/agenda21/ch-36.html>

<sup>27</sup> Environment Australia. (1998), *Australia’s Ocean Policy: Report of the Ministerial Advisory Group*, Canberra, Environment Australia, p27.



By making a commitment in the Australian Oceans Policy to 'decision-making and on-ground actions', the Federal Government has set a framework within which 'a stewardship ethic for our marine environment can develop'.<sup>28</sup> The Government recommends that both private industry and the community take responsibility for the care of our oceans and coasts and 'change their behaviour accordingly'.<sup>29</sup> My research – and my artwork generally – is a response to this sentiment.

There is an increasingly perceived need today for important global issues to be tackled from many perspectives, utilising collaborative, multidisciplinary approaches. Thus significant synergies have developed in recent years between art and other disciplines, and in particular between art and science. Whilst acknowledging that issues pertaining to the marine ecosystem are rightly seen to constitute important matters for science to address, my research aims to demonstrate that art has enormous potential to promote awareness of the urgency of such issues to the public at large.

I have discussed above both the subjective and objective influences that have shaped my artistic philosophies and priorities. Underlying these is my commitment to a praxis of social change. In considering the capacity for art to effect social change, one is entering the realm of values – of deep-seated core beliefs and attitudes. Thus my art is directed, at least in part, to contributing to a process of attitudinal change in relation to marine ecology.

Since it is my intention to help shift values in the direction of ecological sustainability, I have to ask myself: 'Who do I need to

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p41.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

reach?’ In response to this question, two distinct population cohorts become apparent. The first of these is the public taken as a whole; the second is that stratum of decision-makers whose actions have, negatively or positively, had the greatest impact upon the future wellbeing of the marine environment. It has become clear to me that taking art to ‘non-art’ audiences requires different strategies from those conventionally applied to the gallery situation. In the former, the artist becomes a creative interlocutor, neither employing art as propaganda, nor setting up a ‘critical distance’ between artist and viewer. This has had implications for the modes of art which I have employed and the venues for their presentation.

Historically, printmaking was seen as a powerful means of providing widely accessible, ‘democratic’ images. As such, printmaking initially seemed to suit my project. I soon moved, however, to experiment with large-scale multimedia installation, feeling that this form might possess the greatest capacity to reach a large, non-traditional (in an art-viewing sense) audience. It became evident that this seemed to be the case. To illustrate this point, I refer to a 1999 exhibition of my prints in a conventional gallery format. Over the duration of a week, the show was attended by approximately 150 people, a figure regarded by the gallery authorities as quite a good level of visitation. In the same year my first multimedia performance was held in a lecture theatre setting and was attended by as many people on a single night. It became clear to me that the cross-art<sup>30</sup> and the art-science collaboration, along with the large, multimedia mode of artistic presentation, potentially provided much more effective means for the realisation of my goals. With such means I could reach larger

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<sup>30</sup> I prefer this term to the more commonly used ‘interdisciplinary art’, because the latter connotes narrowly defined academic distinctions that seem inappropriate, not only to the concept of ecology and the relational complexity that word implies, but also to the scope and the activist intent of my own project.

viewing audiences and communicate more directly with the scientists and policy-makers whose decisions directly impinged upon the marine domain.

It also suggested that I should present my art in high-visibility public spaces, rather than exclusively within conventional gallery spaces. In keeping with my ecological orientation I also conceived it as a value that I should minimise the site-impact of my works by making them demountable, portable, and perhaps temporary in form.

My project has not only been concerned with the realisation of the end product *per se*. The idea of collaboration with other artists and with scientists and policy-makers has come to form my working praxis. As such, I have come to regard the working process itself as the provider of significant rewards. In the deployment of a range of modes and methods and in the involvement of different people, all kinds of synergies, energies, and unanticipated outcomes become possible. In my collaborations with artists, I have sought outcomes which reconcile optimum public accessibility and artistic integrity. These are not, in any case, necessarily contradictory aims.

Increasingly over the past decade there has been a reaching-out by individuals and organisations professionally involved with ecological matters to join with other people who work in radically different ways from their own. There is a 'widening of the front'. The American art theorist, Suzi Gablik, has crystallised the case for the involvement of art workers in such synergistic enterprises<sup>31</sup>. In my own case, I have the testimony of Dr. Ehsan Mesbahi, a marine engineer with the (UK) University of Newcastle's MARTOB – 'On Board Treatment of Ballast' –

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<sup>31</sup> Gablik, S. (1991), *The Reenchantment of Art*, Thames & Hudson, New York, pp76-131.

Consortium. Dr. Mesbahi, with whom I shared a session at the 2002 meeting of the International Maritime Organisation in London, has written in correspondence to me that:

the combination of engineers, scientists, technologists, biologists, environmentalists and economists that constitutes MARTOB has always thought that important environmental issues like the introduction of non-indigenous species need to be publicised and presented to the outside world by any possible way of communicating. The one that we are aware of and frequently use is a kind of 'technical language' which, generally speaking, may not be very appealing to many members of the public. The power of 'artistic language' and its great combination of audio and visual effects would definitely attract more attention and increase public awareness. Human cognition, perception and memorisation of events by using visual patterns associated with proper background sound effects is a lot more successful than textual, mathematical, cold and bold presentations!<sup>32</sup>

In crossing disciplinary boundaries in this way we are contributing to an emerging collective consciousness. Within this collective human consciousness are many social and individual 'contracts' forged in response to the spectrum of ecological concerns. Historians, poets, ethicists, sociologists, scientists, artists all can espouse, in their own ways, deep wisdom concerning our ecological future. It is with these kindred spirits that the praxis of my art is linked, and with whom I wish to engage dialectically.

In Hobart I have begun working, at the levels of both art practice and ecological communication, with the Hobart-based poet, essayist and academic, Dr. Peter Hay. Hay, who uses literary texts as tools for the teaching of environmental thought at the University of Tasmania, shares my interest in the educational potential of ecological art. I am also in contact with Dr. Martin Huehner, Director of the Environmental Studies Program at Hiram College, Ohio. Huehner applies artistic methodologies in the teaching of environmental studies.

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<sup>32</sup> Mesbahi, E. (2002), Pers. Comm., 14 February.

Collaboration has confirmed my view of my own art as a communicative device. It also raises other questions. Does art function as a language? What is the status of art as a unique way of knowing? These and other theoretical questions relevant to my work are considered in the next chapter. In addition, I will examine in more detail the notion of art as a generator of social change, and I will discuss the work of artists who, through their work, have sought to achieve social outcomes.

## CHAPTER 2

### Art, Values, and Social Change

Many Modernist art movements of the twentieth century epitomised the maxim of ‘art for art’s sake’. This conception as to what art ‘is’, along with the commensurate image of the artist as outsider remains entrenched within the popular consciousness – as well as within the minds of large numbers of artists who prefer it that way. My research challenges that paradigm. My research is based instead on the maxim of ‘art for society’s sake’. Though I am at pains to eschew the pitfalls inherent in an extreme ‘art for society’s sake’ position – the fundamentalism that reduces art to mere propaganda<sup>1</sup> – I nevertheless critique the equally extreme ‘art for art’s sake’ credo: ‘The view of *l’art pour l’art* [that] ...denies not only the moral and social usefulness of art but its every possible practical function as well.’<sup>2</sup>

This research taps, perhaps, an historical function of art in society. Throughout history and across cultures, art has embodied and communicated values – whether dominant or subversive – in such domains as religion, cosmology, ideology, politics and

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<sup>1</sup> It can be argued that all creative output is, at one level, propaganda, in that it necessarily embodies social assumptions, and this is no less so for artworks that make the deliberate claim to be value-free. Nevertheless, ‘propaganda’ is generally applied to art that seeks to promote an ideologically partisan perspective of politics, narrowly defined – hence my association of it with the word ‘fundamentalism’ within the text. In this sense, then, an art that seeks to raise political awareness and to stimulate discourse, as opposed to one that seeks a simple-minded partisan conversion, is not appropriately described as ‘propaganda’. Given that almost all fine art is allusive and suggestive rather than didactic and options-foreclosing, it follows that the term ‘propaganda’ is almost never appropriately applied to fine art. This distinction is implicit in the discussion that follows in this chapter, where many of these points are elaborated.

<sup>2</sup> Hauser, A. (1982), *The Sociology of Art*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, p315.

ethics. In this role art has fulfilled an intrinsically social function. What we term 'the arts' enable us to assert identity, organise experience, derive meaning, realise aesthetic satisfaction, all in publicly-legitimate ways. As such, art may be regarded as a fundamental, even instinctual human activity. I would argue that art is also a necessary component of social construction; a major force in the formation of social values; a powerful agent in the transmission of culture.

Art possesses the capacity to perpetuate values and is capable of changing them. Historically, this has been understood by the myriad religions of the world, by political regimes and most certainly by present-day advertisers. The latter, through their choice of visual images associated with a product, are able to manipulate our choices – our values – virtually at will. This has also been understood by people seeking to undermine religions, regimes, and products in the market place.

In what ways does art function as an agent of resistance or a propagator of change? The achievement of social change through the adoption of new values occurs not only through the input of factual data, but also through the internalisation of *feelings* that inspire action for change. Of course, new values can come from the objective acquisition of scientific and other facts, but shifts in values can also arise from our affective response to particular phenomena. Affective response to a work of art is termed 'aesthetic experience': that is, sensory experience which is 'above' ordinary experience. When a work of art generates an aesthetic response in an audience it has established a fundamental condition for the communication of its message.

In the following chapter I elaborate this position, presenting a view of a function of art as a public, activist and democratic force in society. I discuss the work of art movements and individual

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practitioners who have sought, in various ways, to put such a view into practice.

### Art as a Social Activity

Sociologist Janet Wolff<sup>3</sup> argues that art is a social product, historically situated and produced. It is not the product of divine inspiration. Art is not, in fact, essentially different from other work, in that it is largely determined by social structure, and is shaped and constrained by prevailing political forces and technological circumstances. The notion of the artist as an individual unconstrained by institutional ties, as an heroic, often tortured and alienated soul is, Wolff argues, itself a politically-charged social construct, one intended to obscure the degree to which a work of art is socially dependent. She states, 'The concept of the artist/author as some kind of asocial being, blessed with genius, waiting for divine inspiration and exempt from all normal rules of social intercourse is therefore very much an ahistorical and limited one'<sup>4</sup>. In fact, argues Wolff, because of their marginalisation, today's artists *are* likely to be alienated and isolated, 'but this does not mean that it is the essence of art to transcend life, and to surpass the real, the social, and even the personal'.<sup>5</sup> A sociological perspective necessarily focuses upon social structure, and it is to be expected that a 'sociological' definition of art would contain such characteristics as those outlined above. Such a view encourages me to step back and look at what is considered 'art' in our society.

Suzi Gablik also argues that the dominant view of art as the socially detached product of an asocial individual genius is not a

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<sup>3</sup> Wolff, J. (1981), *The Social Production of Art*, Macmillan, London.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p12.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

universal conception of the role and function of art but the expression of an ideology of creative production that is specific to industrial modernism:

Modernism was the art of the industrial age. It did not inspire what Octavio Paz called 'creative participation'. Rather, it exalted above all the complete autonomy of art, an art-for-art's sake that severed bonds with society and aimed itself instead at advancing art history. Concerned with the object as the chief source of value, modernism encouraged isolation, distancing, and in a certain sense, depreciation of the Other. Its core structure of feeling was alienation... The dominant modes of thinking in our society have conditioned us to think of art as specialized objects created not for moral or practical or social reasons, but simply to be contemplated and enjoyed for the sake of individual pleasure. Autonomy, however, has condemned art to social impotence.<sup>6</sup>

Gablik criticises the 'deep dualism between public and private [that] existed within modernism, which severed any connections between them and colored our view of art as basically a "private" affair'<sup>7</sup>. She takes as paradigmatic of this view – whose time, she thinks, is up – the following claim made by Christo in an interview published in *Flash Art*:

The work is irrational and perhaps irresponsible. Nobody needs it. The work is a huge individualistic gesture that is entirely decided by me... One of the greatest contributions of modern art is the notion of individualism... The work of art is a scream of freedom.<sup>8</sup>

It is Gablik's contention that we stand at a point of time in which society is undergoing a paradigm shift that involves 'a sense of being part of something larger than oneself', that this paradigm shift 'has dramatic consequences for our understanding of art', and that, as exemplified by the standpoint articulated above by Christo, 'we've finally come up against the limits of that particular paradigm'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Rifkin, N., and Gablik, S. (1992), 'Value Beyond the Aesthetic', a panel discussion in *Art Papers*, March-April, p28.

<sup>7</sup> Gablik, S. (1992), *The Reenchantment of Art*, Thames and Hudson, New York, p171.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Rifkin and Gablik, *op.cit.*, p28.

We need instead, Gablik argues, 'a connective aesthetics' in which 'the meaning of the work lies neither in the observer, nor in what is observed, but in the relationship between the two'.<sup>10</sup> She makes a case for an art 'that is oriented toward dynamic participation and that seeks to overcome modernism's historic failure to connect with the archetypal other'. Such an art 'will have to deal with living contexts, transforming the experience of exclusion into one of creative empowerment in the community [and requiring] an experience with reciprocal listening'.<sup>11</sup> Of course, an art that is interactive, that involves 'being in some kind of open conversation with the audience'<sup>12</sup>, is not necessarily an art of the specialist audiences that frequent museums and art galleries.

Sociologists Arnold Foster and Judith Blau stress the centrality of art within cultural creation, and thus the cultural specificity of art. 'Attuned to our own place and time', they write, 'we sometimes forget that art is universal and has existed since the Paleolithic Age'.<sup>13</sup> What is considered art in one culture is not always considered art within another. Consider a culture where art is an integral part of life, and not a specialised activity for an esoteric caste of gifted individual creators. If ceremony is essential to the fabric of that culture, then ceremony may be the most significant medium of artistic expression.<sup>14</sup> Foster and Blau are critical of

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p29.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p30.

<sup>13</sup> Foster, A.W., and Blau, J.R. (1989), 'Introduction', in A.W. Foster and J.R. Blau (eds.), *Art and Society: Readings in the Sociology of the Arts*, State University of New York Press, Albany (NY), p3.

<sup>14</sup> A good demonstration of the validity of the case for cultural specificity of art is provided by the Pasadena Tournament of Roses, 'a vast floral pageant and parade held on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January since 1890... [It] features up to sixty self-propelled floats... decorated exclusively with fresh flowers and vegetable materials in their natural state... the parade is televised by two national networks and a number of

what they call 'psychological' theories of art. Psychological (or individualist) theories of art fail because 'the need for aesthetic experience can be satisfied without creating art, such as in the appreciation of nature'. Moreover, 'the artwork is seldom treated in any way except as a complex of stimuli', which is of 'little use for anyone who wants to understand art as something which acts in society and, in turn, is influenced and shaped by society'.<sup>15</sup> Anthropologist Arnold Rubin's view is similar. He is critical of approaches to art history that assume an evolutionary progression from the primitives of the past to the contemporary 'geniuses and masterpieces' of the modern period – and, overall to a 'preoccupation with the exceptional and the extraordinary'.<sup>16</sup>

For Rubin, affective response is not confined to art but occurs within religion, ritual and symbolism. In fact, his analysis would seem to blur the distinctions between these domains. In 1984, a friend recalled witnessing London National Gallery patrons in front of Leonardo's large chalk drawing of *The Virgin and Child with St. Anne* [fig 2] so moved by the experience that they fell to their knees before the work in prayer. It was impossible to say where artistic response ended and religious response began. In religious experience (as in love) a state of heightened awareness can be achieved precisely because one is imbued with a profound sense of meaning. Artworks can be significant in the same way because – in the context of great works – they can also inculcate in the viewer an unmediated sense of profound meaning.

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independent local stations... The total estimated television audience is over 100,000,000 persons' (Rubin, A. [1979], 'Anthropology and the Study of Art in Contemporary Western Society: The Pasadena Tournament of Roses', in J. Cordwell, [ed.], *The Visual Arts: Plastic and Graphic*, Moutin, The Hague, pp 672-673). Rubin discusses the Pasadena Tournament of Roses at length in support of his argument in defence of the cultural relativity of art.

<sup>15</sup> Foster and Blau, *op.cit.*, p6.

<sup>16</sup> Rubin, *op.cit.*, p669.

This *sense* of meaning is different from the *description* of meaning that the scientist may provide. Aesthetic experience bypasses words and numbers – the tools of objective description.<sup>17</sup> But because a particular meaning cannot be described or quantified does not mean that it does not exist. It could be stated that values and behaviours inspired by love and religious experience form the very foundations of people's lives. That the sensations of love and religious experience are



Figure 2.

**Leonardo da Vinci**  
*Cartoon for the Virgin and Child*  
*with St. Anne* (c 1500)  
Charcoal on paper  
139x107cm  
National Gallery, London

essentially 'aesthetic' in kind begs the question: Can aesthetic experience of art inspire values and behaviours of the same import and to the same degree as love and religious experience?

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<sup>17</sup> Though words too can, as in literature, evoke the aesthetic response.

An important theorist of the integral place of art within a culture was John Dewey. He asserted that art should be intimately tied to communal experience as a social and human necessity. It should reflect and celebrate common experience and do so – crucially – in the form of aesthetic experience. Dewey argued, in fact, that ‘the live creature’<sup>18</sup> requires, as a fundamental human need, social circumstances and structures that could facilitate an aesthetic interpretation of their own communal state. When art becomes the preserve of an ‘aesthetically-credentialed’ elite, he argued, this inherent need is denied the majority of citizens: ‘When, because of their remoteness, the objects acknowledged by the cultivated to be works of fine art seem anemic to the mass of people, esthetic hunger is likely to seek the cheap and the vulgar’.<sup>19</sup> To Dewey, art is a crucial human need and, by extension, a crucial social need, and should serve as both mirror and signpost to lived experience within a culture or community.

In Dewey’s view, art can play an important role in confronting socially dysfunctional conditions and strengthening ties and bonds that are crucial to communal well-being. It is the ‘means whereby the meaning of group life [is] consummated’.<sup>20</sup> The arts provide the most important means of developing a sense of community that transcends a narrow economic focus, fostering a greater connection to a principled and value-based social existence. It is also important in the development of a sense of home and place.<sup>21</sup> Dewey laments ‘the mobility of trade and of populations due to the economic system [that] has weakened or

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<sup>18</sup> Dewey, J. (1958), *Art As Experience*, Capricorn, New York, pp3-19.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p6.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p7.

<sup>21</sup> I will discuss the importance of home and place as ecological values in the next chapter.

destroyed the connection between works of art and the *genius loci* of which they were once the natural expression'.<sup>22</sup>

When art is perceived as having no intrinsic connection to the social realm, it is seen by the public as being essentially cynical. Karel Appel, lamenting such a state of affairs, once stated: 'I paint like a barbarian – in a barbaric age'<sup>23</sup>.



Figure 3.

**Karel Appel**  
*Woman with Head* 1964  
Sandstone and pigment  
Oil on canvas  
185 x 225cm

Perhaps the non-engaged stance of the artist has helped foster this alienation. The modernist dictum of art-for-art's-sake, along with the attendant separation of art from popular experience has served to establish a place for art outside the shared experience of community. As a consequence, art is seen to possess no function outside itself, with the consequential raising of questions as to art's relevance and validity in stressful and rapidly changing

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p9.

<sup>23</sup> Appel, K., *The Reality of Karel Appel*, 16mm film, John Vrijman (director), 15min colour.

Accessed on line 27/8/02

<http://www.roland-collection.com/rola>

times. Lucy Lippard, for example, refers to 'art's public image of haughty powerlessness and humiliating manipulatability'.<sup>24</sup>

Like Dewey and Lippard I hold art to be a primarily social activity; one that serves social purposes. Art is, in the view of Marxist theorist, Ernst Fischer, a necessary means whereby man [*sic*] can understand himself as part of a larger whole:

He wants to refer to something that is more than "I", something outside himself and yet essential to himself... to make his individuality social... Art is the indispensable means for this merging of the individual with the whole<sup>25</sup>.

This linking of myriad individual sensibilities constitutes a 'collective consciousness'. The potential of art to fulfil this social function is dependent upon our acceptance of the proposition that art is a way of knowing and that it operates as a virtual language – which is to say that art is a form of communication.

### **Art, Communication and Social Change**

How are values embodied in a work of art and how are these conveyed to the viewer?

Marcuse argues that 'art has its own language and illuminates reality only through this other language.'<sup>26</sup> This 'language' resides in the relationship between 'aesthetic form, autonomy and truth...each transcends the historical arena' and, from the synergy of their interrelationship, art takes on the function of

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<sup>24</sup> Lippard, L. (1984), 'Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power', in B. Wallis [ed.], *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, p345.

<sup>25</sup> Fischer, E. (1963), *The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach*, Penguin, Harmondsworth (Eng.), p8.

<sup>26</sup> Marcuse, H. (1978), *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, Macmillan, London, p22.



‘communicating truths’.<sup>27</sup> Thus ‘the political potential of art lies only in its aesthetic dimension’.<sup>28</sup> Art’s capacity to promote change lies in the uniquely aesthetic nature of its communication. It is an ‘aesthetic language’. It ‘communicates truths not communicable in any other language’.<sup>29</sup> Because, in the wider society, the discourse of the dominant interests overwhelmingly privileges what is imagined to be a value-free rationality devoid of subjectivity, this aesthetic language has an inherent subversiveness perhaps not present in other communicative modes. The language of art seems to me ideally suited to communicate ecological concerns.

But this still begs the question: What is ‘an aesthetic language’? The word ‘aesthetic’ is from the Greek word ‘aesthetikos’, which means ‘heightened experience’ or ‘feeling’. Since the eighteenth century, the term has been applied mainly to the arts, and to the visual arts in particular. ‘Aesthetic’, however, describes a particular level of experience that can be generated by stimuli other than of the artistic kind. Simply seeing a work of art does not of itself constitute an aesthetic experience. Rather, it is a heightened affective response that occurs as a consequence of the seeing that constitutes the aesthetic. It is also an experience that involves the transmission of knowledge. Art is a unique way of knowing, one which is derived from the artist’s subjective experience and response. For the art image to be experienced subjectively by the viewer (in the case of visual art), the image has to be organised in terms of artistic form, and this involves the application of (artistic) knowledge which has essentially been acquired by objective means. Thus artistic form – the visual language of art – may be manipulated more or less objectively by the artist, but the inherent meanings communicated by artistic

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p9.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

form are grasped not only by the intellect but by the senses – via what, in a seeming paradox, Witkin has described as ‘the intelligence of feeling’.<sup>30</sup>

That artistic meaning should resonate on a subjective level, within the affective domain of knowing, does not diminish the veracity of artistic meaning as ‘truth’. By virtue of their idiosyncratic modes of representation *as* images, artistic meanings are unique, and they defy translation into other forms of knowledge: ‘Works of art are indeed artistic statements, stating truths that cannot be communicated in any other way’.<sup>31</sup> Thus, whilst a *sense* of meaning in a work of art may be experienced, the exact nature of that meaning tends, paradoxically, to defy precise verbal description, remaining enigmatic and elusive.

The impact of aesthetic experience may not be felt immediately, but rather may work a slow course through the ethical tissue that defines a person’s core being, the effects of the experience being realised at a later time, and unpredictably. I concur with the Marxist theoretician Gyorgy Lukacs’ conception of aesthetic assimilation as a process of revelation: it frees what was otherwise not amenable to change; it makes one receptive to the new. Lukacs argues that:

The aesthetic effect does influence the receiver’s practical goals and desires, but... the influence is not immediate. The aesthetic effect does not solve any of the receiver’s problems, complex or

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p10.

<sup>30</sup> Witkin, R. (1974), *The Intelligence of Feeling*, Heinemann Educational, London.

<sup>31</sup> Hirst, P. (1974), *Knowledge and the Curriculum: A Collection of Philosophical Papers*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, p153. Witkin’s concept of an ‘intelligence of feeling’ implies that artistic meaning is felt rather than coherently understood, but also that such feeling nevertheless constitutes ‘knowledge’, or a ‘sense of knowing’, or revelation. Perhaps there is an inverse relationship between the degree of ‘revelatory potential’ in an artwork and its degree of didacticism. That is, the more didactic it is, the less, perhaps, is an artwork experienced aesthetically.

simple, personal or social, but it does 'develop a human readiness'... The real power of artistic evocation is that it enlarges the receiver's picture about himself and the world in which he lives. Thus, in the total aesthetic experience there is no complete separation between life and art.<sup>32</sup>

I have argued that art is an inherently social activity, and a uniquely aesthetic form of communication, one that infers that knowledge and truth are not separate from feelings and values. If art can function as a language of social expression, it follows that it has the potential to embody and communicate values – including values *vis-à-vis* ecological issues – and even to influence change in values. Ours is often described as a highly visual culture, a view based on our familiarity and relative ease with symbols, images and other visual stimuli formed by the prolific and ubiquitous world of mass media, the internet and advertising. To what extent, however, has this visual literacy transferred to a greater appreciation of art? There is no reason, writes Lippard, 'why art should not be able to reflect social concerns of our day as naturally as novels, plays and music'.<sup>33</sup> It is the perception of such a social potential within art – and of new art media which possess popular currency – that has had a



Figure 4.

**John Glover**  
*Mills Plains* c1832-34  
Oil on canvas  
72.26 x 151.9cm  
Tasmanian Museum  
and Art Gallery, Hobart

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<sup>32</sup> Kiralyfalvi, B. (1975), *The Aesthetics of Gyorgy Lukacs*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ), pp121-122.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

major impact on my own art practice.

Historically, art has played a significant role in the formation, change and maintenance of social, political, religious and ethical values. In the main, however, such values have been those of the dominant interests in any given society.

It is itself an ironic indication of acquiescence to social hegemony when it is so widely assumed that only art that is seen to *challenge the status quo* is that which propounds political ideas; while art whose images and forms *embody* the values and political ideas of the *status quo* is seen to be value-neutral and, in fact, quite devoid of political ideas. The seemingly benign colonial Tasmanian landscapes of John Glover (1767-1849) become sites of contention when seen in this light. *Mills Plains* (fig.4) is a typical Glover landscape-with-figures: the 'figures' being the (by-then-removed) Tasmanian Aborigines. In his critique of such works, art historian Ian McLean writes:

Glover places his Aborigines in a precolonial scene. In his paintings the Palawa become mythical antecedents cast back into an indefinite past, as if the Druids of Van Diemen's Land. Glover had a strong motive; he actually owned the land he painted and, like the English aristocracy, wanted to picture a genealogy of power and kinship, not conquest. His was a Tory view of the landscape which sought not to displace the Aborigines but to inherit their birthright.<sup>34</sup>

Whilst the latent meanings of Glover's landscapes may be seen to have served a hegemonic function, other Tasmanian landscapes have challenged this society's dominant values. More recently, Peter Dombrovskis's photography, like that of Olegas Truchanas before him, has presented an ideologically-constructed idea of wilderness that has been put to the service of the conservationist cause. His most famous photograph, *Rock Island Bend* (1983),

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<sup>34</sup> McLean, I. (1998), *White Aborigines: Identity Politics in Australian Art*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp38-39.

[fig.5] is widely acknowledged as one of the most politically potent image in recent Australian environmental history.

Martin Thomas describes the role of this single photograph in the Franklin Dam dispute thus:

The Dombrovskis image became a central icon in the campaign, emerging as one of those essential photographs that shape the face of public history. A few days before the 1983 election, with the Tasmanian dam a national issue, colour reproductions of Rock Island Bend were printed in a million newspapers, emblazoned with the caption: "Could you vote for a party that will destroy this?"... The mechanical reproduction of the photograph was pitted against the proliferation of hydro technology... the photograph won.<sup>35</sup>



Figure 5

**Peter Dombrovskis**

*Morning Mist, Rock Island Bend* (1983)

photograph on 5x4 ektrachrome E6 film

24x 19cm

Traditionally, and notwithstanding notable historical exceptions, the artist was more likely to be a defender than a critic of existing values. Lippard, however, has maintained that there exists an inherent subversiveness within aesthetic language, arguing that 'potentially powerful art is almost by definition oppositional – that work which worms its way out of the prescribed channels and is

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas, M. (1999), 'Introduction', in M. Thomas (ed.), *Uncertain Ground: Essays Between Art + Nature*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, p10. See also Bonyhady, T. (1996), 'The Photo that Changed Us', *Weekend Australian*, 29-21 April, Features p.5; Grant, P. (2001), 'Wild Art at the World's End', *Artlink*, 21 (1), pp14-18.

seen in fresh light'.<sup>36</sup> If so, art's capacity to contribute to social change may be greater than is commonly appreciated.

## Public Art

Artists who embody the thrust of the argument set out above engage in a praxis that may be described as 'public art', an art that is characterised by its presentation in public spaces (rather than on the gallery wall), and with the intent to communicate to larger (and 'non-art') audiences. 'Public art' is a term also employed in reference to somewhat banal acts of civic beautification. Though it may not always be easy to distinguish between the two, my use of the term will refer to art and artists committed to influencing social values, as distinct from providing civic adornment.

In the remainder of this chapter I will describe the particular potentials, problems and challenges facing the practitioners of public art so defined. I will also consider the work of prominent public artists whose work has particularly inspired my own: Joseph Beuys, Shirin Neshat, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Jenny Holzer, and the Fluxus movement.<sup>37</sup> It is also the case that, like myself, many public artists work specifically with ecological themes. Some of these artists are discussed in the following chapter, when principles of public art are applied within a context of ecology, and specifically marine ecology.

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<sup>36</sup> Lippard, *op.cit.*, p345.

<sup>37</sup> There are several other artists whom I could have discussed – Barbara Kruger and Ian de Gruchy, for example – but these have been excluded for want of space.

My attraction to public art as opposed to art in the conventional exhibition format stems from a single factor: public art reaches a vastly wider audience than does gallery-constrained art, at least in Tasmania, where galleries are visited by a relatively small cohort of art enthusiasts. An art that takes upon itself a social critique function should, I believe, seek as wide an exposure as possible. Art that is confined in its impact to a small audience is obviously confined in its social impact. I agree with the Marxist commentator, Raymond Williams, who argues, in the context of literature (though his argument can be applied to creative work generally), for a 'transformation of social relations' between artist and audience. Not only must the artist be 'integrated... into public life', but there must be 'new kinds of popular, including collaborative [art]'.<sup>38</sup> The individual artists whom I consider below meet all these criteria: they deploy their art in the service of social change; they work in public spaces in order to engage with large, non-specialist audiences (though Neshat is an exception here); and they work with 'new kinds of popular art'.

There are, nevertheless, problems, not least of which is the greatly heightened personal stress that public space exhibition can impose upon the artist. The public is a more demanding clientele than the cognoscenti, being somewhat given to forcefully voiced and sweeping condemnation. The relationship between public artist and audience is an essentially interactive one, requiring the artist to step outside the normal exhibition 'comfort zone'. As the Polish projection artist, Krzysztof Wodiczko, has written:

The aim of critical public art is neither a happy self-exhibition nor a passive collaboration with the grand gallery of the city, its ideological theatre and architectural-social system. Rather, it is an engagement in strategic challenges to the city structures and mediums that mediate our everyday perception of the world; an

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<sup>38</sup> Williams, R. (1977), *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p203.

engagement through aesthetic-critical interruptions, infiltrations, and appropriations that question the symbolic, psycho-political, and economic operations of the city.<sup>39</sup>

Wodiczko also highlights the tendency to confuse 'public art' with sanitised, officially sponsored or sanctioned programs of 'art in public places'. The former critiques and confronts; the latter comforts and flatters official policy and ideology. Wodiczko writes:

I must express my critical detachment from what is generally called 'art in public places'. This bureaucratic-aesthetic form of public legitimisation may allude to the idea of public art as a social practice but in fact has little to do with it. Such a 'movement' wants to first protect the autonomy of art (bureaucratic aestheticism) as proof of its accountability. Such work functions at best as liberal urban decoration.<sup>40</sup>

There is a recurring enticement to the public artist to allow their work to be appropriated by architects and other space-shaping professionals to larger visions and schemes that are not the artist's own. Even without this lure, the temptation is to produce art that remains within certain norms of bureaucratic acceptability in order to soften the confrontational stresses that public art can generate. Such a course of action is also likely to secure access to more of the limited number of suitable public spaces for exhibition, spaces over which the artist her/himself would not normally have control.

Finally, there remains a prejudice in the mainstream art-world that public art is somehow less 'legitimate'; that it is not as 'good' if it is in the public sphere. I regard such a view as unreasonable, and a prejudice which, I believe, stems in part from the assumption that the general public is artistically less discerning than the more critically sophisticated clientele of a gallery.

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<sup>39</sup> Wodiczko, K. (1999), *Critical Vehicles: Writings, Projects, Interviews*, MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass.), p27.



The Marxist theoretician, Walter Benjamin, argues that politically motivated work is only truly successful if it also satisfies the criteria of aesthetic merit. Benjamin has written of literature:

a work of literature can be politically correct only if it is also correct in the literary sense. That means that the tendency which is politically correct includes a literary tendency... this literary tendency... makes up the quality of a work. It is because of this that the correct political tendency of a work extends also to its literary quality.<sup>41</sup>

Transposing Benjamin's argument into an art context would mean that socially focused art only qualifies as 'art' if it meets the criteria of aesthetic merit. If it fails to meet such standards the work not only fails as art but fails in its political intent. Socially-focused art, then, must satisfy accepted criteria of aesthetic merit, whilst at the same time succeeding in other ways. In particular, perhaps, it must effectively communicate with non-specialist audiences.

Turning to the 'prominent public artists' listed above, I will start with Joseph Beuys and the Fluxus movement, in acknowledgement of their historical importance in the development of the theory and practice of public art. Fluxus generally – and Beuys in particular – are important to me because of the ecological dimensions of their work, but I am here concerned principally with their status as early practitioners and communicators of the principles and values of public art.

It is difficult to satisfactorily define Fluxus as an artistic movement. David T. Doris describes it as a multidisciplinary or inter-media movement of disparate artists and art commentators of the early 1960s. 'Fluxus was a group of nominally kindred spirits who together and separately surveyed the peripheral

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

territories of their respective disciplines', Doris writes. 'The new structures that resulted from these explorations tested received notions of the limits of the arts'.<sup>42</sup> As Simon Shaw-Miller notes, 'Fluxus was concerned with the ground between media, that which they already have in common, the locus of flux'.<sup>43</sup> Fluxus placed particular emphasis upon inter-media performance, termed 'Actions', in which it sought to replicate the flux of nature within artistic flux, advocating a low-tech aesthetic.<sup>44</sup> The relevance of the Fluxus movement to my practice lies in its non-conformist approach to artistic communication, an approach which, when combined with the scale of the inter-media 'Actions' that the Fluxus artists staged, inevitably took it into the public domain.

Joseph Beuys was, for a time, prominent within Fluxus. He was attracted to the conception of Fluxus as 'the applied arts'<sup>45</sup>, though he was never completely at home in the movement.<sup>46</sup> Beuys was impatient with the view of art as a human activity that could be confined within a labelled box. Klaus Staeck has written that 'probably no-one else has ever lived the oneness of art and life so convincingly as Beuys... he constantly challenged the restricted traditional view of art'.<sup>47</sup> Staeck describes Beuys as 'one of the few artists to achieve worldwide celebrity without ever having fixed links with the gallery'.<sup>48</sup> Beuys deemed it necessary to move beyond the gallery because his art was

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<sup>41</sup> Benjamin, W. (1977), *Understanding Brecht*, NLB, London, p86.

<sup>42</sup> Doris, D.T. (1998), 'Zen Vaudeville: A Medi(t)ation in the Margins of Fluxus' in K. Freidman (ed.), *The Fluxus Reader*, Academy Editions, Chichester (Eng.), pp91-135.

<sup>43</sup> Shaw-Miller, S. (1996), "'Concerts of Everyday Living": Cage, Fluxus and Barthes, Interdisciplinarity and Inter-media Events', *Art History*, Vol.19, p3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Stachelhaus, H. (1987), *Joseph Beuys*, Abbeville, New York, p128.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp129, 132.

<sup>47</sup> Staeck, K. (1986), "'Democracy is Fun'", in T. Nevill (trans.), *Joseph Beuys: In Memory Joseph Beuys. Obituaries. Essays, Speeches*, Inter Nationes, Bonn, p12.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

conjoined to social goals that were intensely political and needed to confront all of society. Staock argues that the essence of Beuys' project was deliberately played down by critics:

Nothing... got Beuys more worked up than any attempt at separating his works and the accompanying political intentions. The usual approach was to praise the earlier drawings but try to forget Beuys' involvement in the environmental and peace movement. He constantly kept an eye on what the powerful were up to... He knew that harmless gestures were not enough for countering the catastrophes that threaten.<sup>49</sup>



Figure 6

Joseph Beuys

7,000 Oaks (1982)

Photograph taken of the first planted oak on the Friedrichsplatz in Kassel, documenta 7, 1982 by Ute Klophaus

In order to realise his commitment to a public and intensely political artistic project, Beuys was determined to liberate art from the gallery, in his view a 'prison house' to which it had been confined. [fig.6] This categorisation of the gallery as incompatible with a socially-focussed art has most attracted me to Beuys' art and his art theories. For Beuys the definition of art is an extended one:

beyond the specialist activity carried out by artists to the active mobilisation of every individual's latent creativity, and then,

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pl4.

following on from that, the moulding of the society of the future based on the total energy of this individual creativity. In other words: of the people by the people for the people.<sup>50</sup>

Fluxus generally, and Beuys in particular, pioneered a vigorous worldwide movement of political public art. The three artists whose work I discuss below are prominent exemplars of what can be achieved within this artistic paradigm. Their art has an added significance for me in that all three have worked extensively with projection, the art medium to which I have increasingly been drawn.

Krzysztof Wodiczko, a Polish artist now living in North America, expresses my own sentiments about the nature of the public arena as artistic space. Through his writing and public art projections, Wodiczko brings communal space to the attention of the public as a site where social issues can be mediated through art. Wodiczko's projected images transform the façades of buildings and monuments. They draw attention to such issues as homelessness, displacement and community identity.<sup>51</sup> Though the projections in his art 'events' are ephemeral – and this is one of the reasons why I find his work so interesting – Wodiczko incorporates images of, and commentary upon his work in books, which he conceives as vehicles for conveying his ideas and views – and to 'inspire new visions, counterpoints and actions'. A Wodiczko book is, in his own words, 'an ongoing written

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<sup>50</sup> Tisdall, C. (1980), *Joseph Beuys: Coyote*, Schirmer/Mosel, Munich, p22.

<sup>51</sup> An Australian artist working a similar seam to Wodiczko, and whose work I much admire, is Ian de Gruchy. Sometimes at the head of a collaborative team, he achieves an impressive sense of fluid movement through manipulations of still images. By using computer generation to build an artwork from the ground up, through precise timing and the use of slow dissolves and seamless animation (even when using still projection), and through the finesse and dexterity with which he deploys his equipment, de Gruchy effectively transforms the space with which he works. His own place is central to his work, and I like the ecological resonances of such a focus.

invitation for readers to become critical “reagents”... sustaining in this way a cultural chain reaction in our democratic laboratory’.<sup>52</sup>

Wodiczko favourably contrasts a public art praxis over one geared to gallery institutions, and for similar reasons to my own: that art functions in fundamentally different ways within public spaces than it does in galleries, and that, as a consequence, it generates different audience dynamics:

I am not dismissing museums or art galleries as ‘public’ spaces but the difference is that in those public spaces, of art institutions, the public acts differently. It is intimidated somehow; it’s confined; it’s inside those institutions. Therefore, social relations of reception in institutional interiors are very different than those on the street.<sup>53</sup>

But it is Wodiczko’s views on the nature of public space and the way that such space can be claimed for political contest that I find most compelling.

Images in public art need to be arresting, because they have to compete for audience attention. Passers-by do not constitute an *actual* but rather a *potential* audience. They must be motivated to move from the role of pedestrian to that of engaged art viewer. The power of Wodiczko’s images largely derives from their directness and simplicity. This observation has led me to consider my own images in similar terms.

Wodiczko’s projections are loaded with cultural references and suggest meanings of which some, such as the loaded gun in his projection on to the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington DC, are obvious. [fig.7] Others are more elusive.

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<sup>52</sup> Wodiczko, *op.cit.*, p.xvii.

<sup>53</sup> Wodiczko, K. (1987), ‘An Interview by Ian Smith-Rubenzahl’, *C Magazine*, Vol.12, p60.



Figure 7.

Krzysztof Wodiczko  
 Ontario Horn Museum,  
 Washington DC  
 Projection  
<http://www.art-for-change.com/>  
 Krzysztof Krzyttm

The point that provides cognitive entry into the work is often an obvious reference to a controversial event within the current political situation, whilst the more elusive references invite questioning on other grounds. The transformation of the buildings into representations of the human image is, I think, an attempt to humanise spaces that have been bureaucratically created, that are deliberately impersonal and even intentionally depersonalised. Wodiczko's project is to reclaim dehumanised space for people, but not in any 'feelgood' way. Wodiczko seeks to remind people that human space is a site of contestation.

Shirin Neshat also works with projected image, though in a somewhat more conventionally filmic way than Wodiczko. Neshat's film installations take the form of politically charged short films. She lives and works in the United States, but was born and raised in Iran, and it is the lot of women in her native Iran that provides the political impetus for her art. At the same time, Neshat seeks to deal with her physical alienation from her native culture and from the political struggles there. As Lynn Herbert notes: 'Neshat dealt with her sense of displacement by

trying to untangle the ideology of Islam through art'<sup>54</sup>, whilst Amei Wallach observes: 'Shirin Neshat has produced a series of stark, visually arresting films that reflect the tensions of Muslim society and her own conflicted role as an Iranian woman living in the West.'<sup>55</sup>



Figure 8.

Shirin Neshat  
*Speechless*, (1996)  
 B&W RC print and ink  
 Photographer Barry Larns

Neshat uses black-and-white film to counterpoint the black chador that is the prescribed dress for women within fundamentalist Iranian Islam. As Wallach notes:

She was struck by the sight of the women in the head-to-toe chador that had become the required attire in the wake of the revolution and had literally changed the landscape... It has become a kind of prison uniform, denying sexuality and individuality.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Herbert, L.M., 'Shirin Neshat: Rapture 1999', Contemporary Arts Museum, New York, Accessed online 2/5/02

<http://www.time.com/time/europe/photoessays/neshat/>

<sup>55</sup> Wallach, A. (2001), 'Shirin Neshat: Islamic Counterpoints', *Art in America*, October, p137.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* Neshat recounts these experiences first hand in an interview with Lina Bertucci (1997), 'Shirin Neshat: Eastern Values', *Flash Art*, vol.30 (no. 197), pp84-87.

Neshat makes stark use of images of chador-clothed women. In her work the dress becomes a symbol of repression and a metaphor for the tension between Islamic culture and the West, between men and women, and between freedom and repression. Writing of her film installation, *Rapture* (1999), Herbert notes especially the male/female tension, and gives it a quasi-ecological context:

The men move in an ordered authoritarian environment, the fortress, a seemingly indomitable architectural element imposed upon the landscape. The veiled women, on the other hand, inhabit the unforgiving wilds of nature, subject to its whims and hardships. Yet the fortress is a ruin, outdated and irrelevant.<sup>57</sup>

Such tension is emphasised by her use of the dual screen, which ‘structurally separates the male and female characters’<sup>58</sup>, and which, as a strategy, forces the viewer to make a conscious effort to disengage from one form of cultural activity and re-engage visually with the activities depicted in the other. The viewer is forced to be an ‘interactive’ participant within a visual conversation – to examine situations from different perspectives. As Herbert puts it, ‘Neshat’s realm is one that both perpetuates and challenges our myriad assumptions and associations’.<sup>59</sup>

I viewed Shirin Neshat’s production, *Rapture* (1999), in London and again in Sydney, and on both occasions found it an extraordinarily moving experience. [fig.9] The viewer becomes a participant immediately upon entering the dim space with its dual screens, each set on an opposite wall to the other, and on which 125 men and 125 women are juxtaposed. The men, in black trousers and white shirts, walk through an old and crumbling fortress. The women, chador-clad, move slowly and with dignity

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<sup>57</sup> Herbert, *op.cit.*

<sup>58</sup> Ryan, O. (2000), ‘Whitney’, *Circa* (Ireland), no 92, p57. On Neshat’s use of the dual screen in her video installation *Turbulent* (1998) see Miller, P.D. (1998), *Parkett*, no.54, pp. 157-159.

<sup>59</sup> Herbert, *op.cit.*



through a turbulent desert. Eventually the two groups confront each other in a frozen silence, before the women continue across the desert to an emerging coastline, where six of them sail away in a boat. The men, however, return to their pointless rituals within the fortress, stirring only occasionally to take note of the progress of the women.



Figure 9.

Shirin Neshat  
Stills from *Rapture* (1999)  
16mm film transferred to DVD,  
shown on 2 facing screens,  
13 minute loop

*Rapture* made a great impression upon me, not purely in a visual sense, though the piece resonated powerfully with its black-and-white starkness and its minimalist approach. The most profound impact of *Rapture*, however, was effected by its power as a political statement.

Neshat's project, along with those of the other artists discussed in this section, intersect my own. *Rapture* makes use of similar devices to those which I have employed in my own art. I have made extensive use of dual projection, though for different reasons, such as the capacity of this device to extend the visual range. Neshat also makes considerable use of gut-wrenching primal sound and music, a potent and unnerving component within her installations that gives the work great emotional

power. Since viewing her work I have been inspired to make greater use of sound in my own installations. Though less evident in *Rapture*, Neshat also makes effective use of calligraphic text derived from the work of dissident Iranian poets, and I have also explored the considerable potential that resides within text and with collaboration with literary artists.

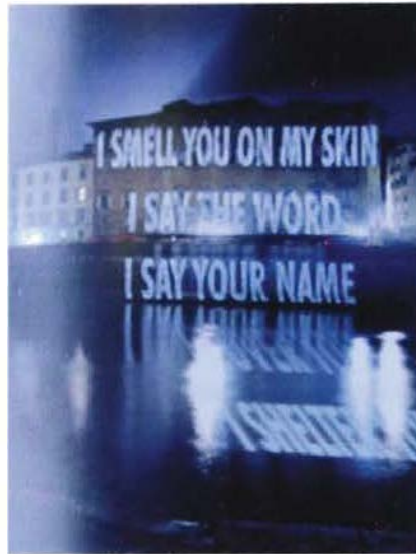


figure 10

**Jenny Holzer**  
From *Arno* (1967-97)  
18.5mm Kodachrome film  
Xenon projection  
Dimensions variable Project,  
Arno River,  
'Biennale de Firenze il tempo e la Moda',  
Florence, 1996

The final artist whom I consider, Jenny Holzer, also uses calligraphic inscriptions and the written word. However, it is not as much the use of text that interests me about Holzer's work, as her more recent projection-based art as a totality. In this later work, Holzer continues to make use of text, but the shift to projection seems to have added depth and piquancy to the pithy, quotable and confrontational epithets that she employs. Like Neshat, Holzer seeks to change the ways by which people construct their place in, and view of the world. She seeks 'the

dematerialization of experience as a tool to heighten awareness of our human physicality and psychology'.<sup>60</sup> But the use of projection in Holzer's work, particularly when a reflective element is incorporated (as in *Arno* [1996-97]), adds capacities for visual poetry that, I believe, her earlier billboard text did not achieve. This comparison between Holzer's earlier and later work – and the greater impact realised in the latter through projection – has provided me with a considerably heightened appreciation of the artistic scope and possibility that projection offers.

In the next chapter, I develop a case for ecological concerns assuming greater significance within art practice in the years ahead, drawing particularly on Gablik's 1992 book, *The Reenchantment of Art*, in which she puts a compelling case for an art of social involvement in defence of ecological causes.

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<sup>60</sup> Brown, K., and Salvatore, N. (1999), 'Trends in Computer and Technological Art', *Art Criticism*, vol.14, p99.

## CHAPTER 3

### Ecological Principles for Art Practice

In Chapter 2, I examined influences from art theory and practice that have helped shape my own work. In this chapter I consider a number of ecological thinkers who have been crucial to the construction of my thought on ecological crisis and on the nature of an environmental commitment. It is not possible to understand my conception of what constitutes 'ecological art' without an understanding of what is involved in the 'ecological' part of the equation.

In *The Reenchantment of Art*, Suzi Gablik develops her theories within a specifically ecological context. 'The task of restoring awareness of our symbiotic relationship with nature', she writes, has become 'the most pressing *and* political need of our time'.<sup>1</sup> Gablik is critical of the position, adopted by certain postmodernist social critics, that we lack as a society 'any great integrating vision or project'. Gablik insists that 'the great collective project has, in fact, presented itself. It is that of saving the earth – at this point, nothing else really matters'.<sup>2</sup> Gablik here constructs a case for the priority of ecologically motivated action over all other social priorities. She also claims for 'ecology' the status of a unifying foundation for the social reconstruction that the times require. Ecology is thus 'a new cultural force we can no longer escape – it is the only effective challenge to the long-term priorities of the present economic order'.<sup>3</sup> Her project, it seems to me, is to give artists the courage to claim an ecological mantle for

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<sup>1</sup> Gablik, S. (1991), *The Reenchantment of Art*, Thames and Hudson, New York, p77.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p26.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p27.

their work, against the predominant critical and ideological sanctioning of self-referential art.<sup>4</sup>

Two specific aspects of Gablik's thought warrant consideration here. One of these – her discussion of developments in theoretical science – I will postpone until later in the chapter. The other is signposted by *The Reenchantment of Art's* Chapter 6 title: 'The Ecological Imperative'. In expanding this 'imperative' Gablik critiques patriarchal western societies in particular, and advocates an orientation toward a fundamental concern for the earth, a concern which, in patriarchal western societies, is tragically lacking:

Modern individuals do not see the earth as a source of spiritual renewal – they see it as a stockpile of raw materials to be exploited and consumed... We are bred from birth to live on the earth as consumers, and this exploitative form of perception now determines all our social, economic and political relationships, in a style that knows no limits... In modern times, the basic metaphor of the human presence on the earth is the bulldozer. Our dealings with the earth in the last two centuries have been guided less and less by moral or ecological considerations and more and more by short term utility and greed. We are the most expensive of the community of nature.<sup>5</sup>

Against this 'de-natured' standpoint, Gablik argues for an ethic of 'relatedness' in which 'community', both human and biological, is rescued from the grip of amoral capitalist individualism. Her 'ecological imperative' is similar to the notion of an 'ecological impulse', as advanced by the Australian scholar, Peter Hay. Hay cites a number of people who articulate the view that:

The wellsprings of a green commitment - at both the activist and more passive levels of identification - are not, in the first instance, theoretical; nor even intellectual. They are, rather, pre-rational. Though such a commitment may be subsequently justified via recourse to an intellectually generated system of

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<sup>4</sup> This is a concern that has also been well articulated by the Australian artist Simeon Nelson: 'much of contemporary visual art [is] too focused on semantics and not enough with broader issues' (Nelson, S. [1997], 'Comment', in *Australian Perspectives 1997: Between Art and Nature*, Exhibition Catalogue, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, p11).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp77-78.

wanted the nature of 'being' to be recognised as the central question of philosophy, specifically a non-abstract conception of being as things in their particularity, their 'realness'. For Heidegger the question of being is... a question of how we 'dwell'.<sup>8</sup>

In arguing for 'being' and 'dwelling' as the central concerns for philosophy, Heidegger pronounced against abstraction, conceptualisation and reason as the essential philosophical processes. He instead argued for processes that seem to have more in common with art and other creative endeavour than with the rational case-construction that is usually considered the province of philosophy. 'To Heidegger', William Lovitt has argued, 'true thinking always remains a revealing', and one 'must follow where that revealing leads'.<sup>9</sup>

The relevance of this to art has been well described by Heidegger himself: 'The art work opens up in its own way the Being of beings. This opening up, i.e., this disconcealing, i.e., the truth of beings, happens in the work. Art is truth setting itself to work'.<sup>10</sup> This strongly implies that an artwork must remain engaged with the world. Julian Young has written of Heidegger that an artwork 'can lose its greatness through "world withdrawal"'. It then becomes a 'museum piece'<sup>11</sup>, what Heidegger calls 'the realm of tradition and conservation'.<sup>12</sup>

And the relevance of this to ecology lies in Heidegger's notion of 'sparing'. A place of dwelling is a space which is a 'field of care'. The Heideggerian phenomenologist, Edward Relph, has written: 'Sparing is a willingness to leave places alone and not to change

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<sup>8</sup> *Op.cit.*, pp159-160.

<sup>9</sup> Lovitt, W., (1977), 'Introduction', in M.Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, Harper & Row, New York, pxxxviii.

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger, M. (1971), *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harper & Row, New York, p39.

<sup>11</sup> Young, J. (2001), *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pl9.

them casually or arbitrarily, and not to exploit them'.<sup>13</sup> This sounds quite passive, but Hay argues that Heidegger's notion of sparing in fact entails responsibilities of activism:

...it extends beyond a passive commitment to personally spare, to actively resist the vandalism others would inflict upon one's home. A 'field of care', in other words, entails a steward's duty of protection. To sit passively by and acquiesce in the destruction of one's home is to fail one's duty to take all steps possible to 'care' for one's dwelling.<sup>14</sup>

Here we can realise a convergence of Hay's essentially defensive 'ecological impulse' and Gablik's more versatile and positive notion of an 'ecological imperative'. This convergence, or synthesis, is epitomised in the wilderness photography of Peter Dombrovskis.



Figure 11

**Peter Dombrovskis**

*Lower Franklin Below Jane River* (1983)

photograph on 5x4 ektrachrome E6 film

21 x 17cm

As described by Martin Thomas, 'the *wilderness* photograph is decidedly embattled. Its waxen similitude sounds a warning that eventually the image is all we will have. Nature... has dwindled to become an endangered species, a rare marsupial mouse'.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Heidegger (1971), *op.cit.*, p41.

<sup>13</sup> *Op.cit.*, p39.

<sup>14</sup> *Op.cit.*, p161.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas, M. (1999), 'Introduction', in M.Thomas (ed.), *Uncertain Ground: Essays Between Art + Nature*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, p10.

Thus the space of which we are so in awe becomes a place we want to protect, the ‘embattled nature’ of Dombrovskis. Nature is ‘an endangered species’, and the sublime meets Hay’s biodiversity-based ‘ecological impulse’.

An explicitly ecological phenomenologist is the American philosopher David Abram. For Abram, ‘the recuperation of the incarnate, sensorial dimension of experience brings with it a recuperation of the living landscape in which we are corporeally embedded’.<sup>16</sup> Abram here establishes an inextricable link between experience, perception and sensation and an ecological groundedness that resonates with the ideas of Hay and Gablik discussed above. Through our senses – explicitly *not* through the reasoning processes of the brain – we establish the requisite sense of belonging to a larger ecological whole. ‘As we return to our senses’, Abram writes:

we gradually discover our sensory perceptions to be simply our part of a vast, interpenetrating webwork of perceptions and sensations born by countless other bodies – supported, that is, not just by ourselves, but by icy streams tumbling down granitic slopes, by owl wings and lichens, and by the unseen imperturbable wind.<sup>17</sup>

From Abram’s ecologically derived phenomenology, a perspective on art is alluded to, one implicitly communicated by Abram: ‘Genuine art we might say, is simply human creation that does not stifle the nonhuman element... Genuine artistry, in this sense, does not impose a wholly external form upon some ostensibly “inert” matter’.<sup>18</sup> There are two other aspects of Abram’s thought that have made a particular impression upon me. One of these is his discussion of language; the other is his consideration of the native American peoples’ way of being.

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<sup>16</sup> Abram, D. (1996), *The Spell of the Sensuous*, Random House, New York, p65.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p278.



Abram devotes much of his book to a consideration of language. Again, as a phenomenologist, he is concerned with how the essences of 'things' are disclosed, or unfold. By 'language' Abram refers to the means by which a phenomenon expresses *itself*. This is a view of language that is slightly different from, but commensurate with, the notion of art as an immediate, sub-rational language. He describes the same primal response that pertains to visual art, but he envisions the response as coming from both directions. Thus he argues that language is 'physically and sensorially resonant' and 'it can never be definitely separated from the evident expressiveness of birdsong'.<sup>19</sup> This is an extremely 'ecological' way of viewing language, one in which all communicating parties participate: '...in the untamed world of direct sensory experience *no* phenomenon presents itself as utterly passive or inert. To the sensing body all phenomena are animate'.<sup>20</sup>

Abram discusses, at length, indigenous relationships with the land. His landscapes are 'storied', after the indigenous fashion. Naming something is not undertaken in order to provide an individual identity, but to locate a feature or a creature within a larger totality. The chief characteristic of this landscape is its interconnectedness. A storied landscape is inevitably one full of relationality. It is also a landscape in which the presence of the sacred becomes manifest. Abram writes of the loss of story in landscape:

This double retreat, of the senses and of spoken stories, from the diverse places that had once gripped them, cleared the way for the notion of a pure and featureless 'space' – an abstract conception that has nevertheless come to seem, today, more primordial and 'real' than the earthly places in which we remain corporeally embedded.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p80.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p81.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p185.

Again we have the phenomenological engagement of the total senses. Abram argues that ‘it is only when a culture shifts its participation to these printed letters [of writing] that the stones fall silent. Only as our senses transfer their animating magic to the written word do the trees become mute, the other animals dumb.’<sup>22</sup>

Abram also argues that ‘to fully engage, sensorially, with one’s earthly surroundings is to find oneself in a world of cycles’.<sup>23</sup> Abram’s concern with biophysical cycles relates ecological ideas to older paradigms of science. The work of Abram points simultaneously in three directions – to science, to philosophy and to the realm of spirit.

In the following, I present the ideas of individuals who are representative of each of these three interlinked domains, and who have made an impact on my own ecological thought. I say ‘interlinked’ because each has gone to considerable lengths to transcend distinctions between science, philosophy and spirit respectively.

For my ideas on the need for science to be recast within a framework of ecological assumptions, I have been strongly influenced by the American theoretical physicist and Director of the Centre for Ecoliteracy in Berkeley, California, Fritjof Capra. Capra is critical of the key axioms of mainstream science as formulated in the seventeenth century by the French philosopher Rene Descartes. For Descartes the human species is fundamentally separate from the rest of creation. Furthermore, the rational part of the human brain is fundamentally separate from the rest of the human body. Only the rational brain, according to Descartes’ theory, is endowed with value,

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p131.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p186.

subjectivity and soul. The rest is mere gross matter, value-free, and available for unconstrained human manipulation. Thus the Cartesian view recognises the universe as a mechanistic system, composed of elementary building blocks, rather than as ecological and composed primarily of relationships. The stark division between mind and body, human and bestial, is what constitutes Cartesian dualism. In this conception – the dominant, prevailing view which has underpinned the philosophy of western science – opposites are paired, but are not in a yin-yang relationship of balance. In the Cartesian model, one half of each dualism is established as superior to the other: rational over intuitive, man over nature, subject over object. Such a view of the inherent superiority of thought over feeling, human over beast, and subject over object has licensed the manipulation of whole ecologies in the interests of the material advancement of one privileged species:

...inner fragmentation mirrors our view of our view of the world 'outside' which is seen as a multitude of separate objects and events. The natural environment is treated as if it consisted of separate parts to be exploited by different interest groups. The fragmented view is further extended to society... The belief that all these fragments – in ourselves, in our environment and in our society – are really separate can be seen as the essential reason for the present series of social, ecological and cultural crises. It has alienated us from nature and from our fellow human beings.<sup>24</sup>

Capra draws parallels between the principles of flow and process to be found within eastern religions and the principles of flux and interconnectedness to be found within the new scientific paradigms of ecology and quantum physics. It is a movement from 'event thinking' to 'systems thinking'. Capra argues that fundamentally different ethical and social norms stem from such a radically reconstituted science. The new ecological paradigm urges a critical reassessment by people in all spheres of life of the

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<sup>24</sup> Capra, F. (1992), *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism*, Flamingo, London, p28.

principles underlying current assumptions, priorities and values. But this is a process that extends beyond the purely rational brain, identifying cognition as ‘the full process of life – including perceptions, emotions and behaviours’.<sup>25</sup> We need, with all our being, to become what Capra calls ‘ecoliterate’, by which he means ‘understanding the principles of organisation of ecological communities (ie. ecosystems) and using those principles for creating sustainable human communities’.<sup>26</sup> It is what Capra, in common with much of the related literature, calls a paradigm shift<sup>27</sup>. Such a paradigm shift requires first and foremost a differently-based science.

The systems view that Capra advocates, with its stress upon interconnectedness, fits my view of ecological art, particularly in its cross-disciplinary and collaborative aspects. To simply select and ‘take’ content for an artwork from subject matter of an ecological kind does not of itself make one an ecological artist. To view problems and projects ecologically is to work across boundaries, to involve oneself in synergistic relationships – to make connections with other artists and other perspectives and other energies. ‘Ecological art’, then, is as much about artistic process as artistic outcomes. This is not to say, however, that outcomes are irrelevant. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, for example, work across boundaries, and in collaborative projects. I do not disapprove of such methods, but their intentions are questionable from an ecological perspective, as are their final products. Christo and Jeannne-Claude’s ‘environmental art’ simply leaves what, in my opinion, is an unacceptably large ‘footprint’. His methodology may be described as ‘ecological’,

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<sup>25</sup> Capra, F. (1996), *The Web of Life: A New Synthesis of Mind and Matter*, Flamingo, London, p278.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p289.

<sup>27</sup> Capra draws upon Thomas Kuhn’s theory of ‘paradigm shifts’ in science. A paradigm shift in scientific views often reflects a cultural shift and a particular vision of reality that is the ‘basis of the way the community organises itself’ (*ibid.*, p5).

but his themes and his outcomes are not: the landscape is merely conceived as a stage upon which to act. I will return to the distinction between environmental art and my own conception of ecological art in the next chapter.

Moving from science to philosophy, and in particular, to ecologically informed ethics, my main influences have been the 'deep ecologists', Arne Naess and Warwick Fox. Here too, the Cartesian legacy of man/nature dualism<sup>28</sup> is a key target for criticism. In one of the most influential early works of ecophilosophy, Lynn White jnr. wrote: 'What we do about ecology depends on our ideas on the man-nature relationship'. As long as this concept of dualism remains within us, 'we will not be able to make these fundamental changes in our attitudes and actions affecting ecology'.<sup>29</sup> The phrase 'deep ecology' was coined in 1973 when the Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess, published his paper, 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary'. The defining characteristics of Naess' 'Summary' are:

- (1) The well-being and flourishing of both human and non-human life on earth represent values in themselves.
- (2) Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
- (3) Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.<sup>30</sup>

There is also a procedural aspect to deep ecology. For Naess, deep ecology is 'predicated on asking deeper and deeper

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<sup>28</sup> Describing the mass of humanity as 'man' inherently provides another Cartesian dualistic construct: namely 'man/woman'.

<sup>29</sup> White, L. (1967), 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis', *Science*, vol.155, p1206.

<sup>30</sup> Naess, A. (1993), 'The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects', in M. E. Zimmerman, J.B. Callicott, G. Sessions, K.J. Warren and J. Clark (eds.), *Environmental Philosophy*:

questions about the ecological relationships of which we are a part'<sup>31</sup>. As the Australian deep ecologist, Warwick Fox, notes:

...this approach attempts to foster a greater awareness of the intimate and manifold relationships that exist between what we conventionally designate as *self* and what we conventionally designate as *environment*. It attempts, in other words, to foster the development of an *ecological* rather than *environmental* consciousness.<sup>32</sup>

I was introduced to the historically important role of Naess through reading Fox's 1990 book, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology*. For Fox the central idea of deep ecology is 'Self-realization!' [his emphasis]. This is a concept which Hay defines as 'the construction of as wide a sense of self as possible through a process of identifying out and including an enlarged scope of life and living process within one's sense of (S)self'.<sup>33</sup> I understand this to mean that a distinction is made in deep ecology between the personal self and the 'capital-S' Self, which is formed by taking on, as part of oneself, all that with which one identifies. As Hay states:

There is nothing mystical about this notion: the commonsense definition is the one that prevails. One extends the perception of self by identifying the interests of entities with which one experiences a sense of commonality as one's own interests'.<sup>34</sup>

More recently Fox has argued for the replacement of the term 'deep ecology' by 'transpersonal ecology' to refer to the ecophilosophical approach that goes beyond 'one's own egoic, biographical, or personal sense of self'.<sup>35</sup> Within Fox's concept one has the same responsibilities to defend and care for that wider ecological Self as one has for one's own bodily self. Perhaps the change of name may not mean significant change in practice.

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*from Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs (NJ), p197.

<sup>31</sup> Fox, W. (1990), *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism*, Shambhala, Boston (Mass.), p92.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p8.

<sup>33</sup> Hay, *op.cit.*, p47.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp47-48.

<sup>35</sup> Fox, *op.cit.*, p190.

What is important, however, is that such a concept, and its attendant label, may form a stronger foundation for an ecological ethics.

The value system espoused by Fox challenges our value priorities. It underpins my own philosophy in its recognition of the importance of the relationships between each one of us and the environment. This 'deeply' ecological way of thinking again emphasises the importance of interconnectedness and ecological relationship that is central to my own practice. However, in that it brings the ecological dimension back into the self, albeit a 'Self' expanded beyond the confines of the body, this axiom of interconnectedness also links ecology back to the act of individual creativity that is, in turn, central to the processes of art.

Having referred back to the three interlinked domains to which Abram's work points, I come to the realm of the spirit. Here the two ecological thinkers who have been particularly influential are La Trobe University's Director of the Centre for Archetypal Studies, the Jungian theologian, David Tacey and the American spiritual ecofeminist, Charlene Spretnak.

Tacey argues that a profound spiritual change in Australian consciousness is needed if we are to develop an ecologically sustainable way of living in this land. We need 'a spiritual revolution in Euro-Australian consciousness'. We are 'spiritually bereft, but the way ahead may not be by means of a return to archaic animism... We must change our consciousness from within... [to] create an answering image to Aboriginal spirituality.'<sup>36</sup> Tacey is arguing here for a transformation in European consciousness that will be substantially influenced by the Aboriginal Dreaming in which 'landscape is a living field of

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<sup>36</sup> Tacey, D. (1995), *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia*, HarperCollins, Blackburn (Vic.), pp133-134.

spirits and metaphysical forces',<sup>37</sup> but which is not merely an appropriation of indigenous spirituality. He considers that 'we need to develop not pre-modern mysticism but rather a postmodern spirituality, one that meets the demands of the present in ways that are entirely in accordance with our own advanced, technological, scientific and intellectual development'<sup>38</sup>. For Tacey the western tradition stands in need of a re-enchantment<sup>39</sup> 'inspired by nature and the archetypal feminine'<sup>40</sup>, because 'the ecological crisis is at bottom a psychological and spiritual crisis'.<sup>41</sup>

I agree that it is imperative for Australians to 'develop a full and vital mythic awareness' so that we may establish 'a deeper spiritual pact with the land'<sup>42</sup> as a prerequisite for learning to live sustainably, and also that we should take our lead in the generation of such a spirituality from indigenous Australia. Tacey forcefully argues that such a process will not primarily be rationally driven, but will come from the immediate and non-reflective impulses that underlie the production of art. I contend that art is almost inherently spiritual, in that it seeks to generate significant affective response within those who encounter it. In Aboriginal art there exist no boundaries between place, the Dreaming and the practice of art. For instance, in a painting of Nicole Newley, *Example Of Living* (2001), [fig.12] themes of the ocean are inextricably bound up in evocations of her own identity and culture.

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p139.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p150.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p203.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p151.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.





Figure 12

Nicole Newley b 1967  
*Example of Living* (2001)  
 Oil on canvas  
 100 x 68cm

Charlene Spretnak's project is to critique – and reject – the modernist, postmodernist and romantic paradigms. None of these paradigms, she argues, is appropriate to the ecological and human needs of our time. Although 'the Romantics addressed many conditions that are still with us today'<sup>43</sup>, Spretnak sees them as simply one of the 'ecospiritual' movements 'resisting modernity'<sup>44</sup>. Postmodernism cannot meet the ecological needs of the time because it is captive to the fetish of denying the realness of the natural world. The modern 'frame of reference' is inadequate because it promotes a 'groundlessness' which conduces to homelessness, alienation, a fixation upon technological tools and a treatment of the natural world as valueless except when it is reduced to human resource.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Spretnak, C. (1997), *The Resurgence of the Real: Body, Nature, and Place, in a Hypermodern World*, Addison-Wesley, Reading (Mass.), pp143.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p133.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp219-224.

Spretnak's ecospiritual perspective argues for 'freedom that flourishes *within* the web of life, not against it'.<sup>46</sup> Like Gablik and Abram, but unlike most of the ecological theorists I have considered here, Spretnak specifically discusses artists whose work, at least in part, shows an unwillingness 'to live with the denials and diminutions inherent in the destructive aspects of modernity'.<sup>47</sup> Spretnak's work provides a convenient link to the environmentally and ecologically focussed artists whose work I will discuss in the next chapter.

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p8.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p7.

## CHAPTER 4

### From Environmental Art to Ecological Art

The nineteenth century Romantics responded to 'the shock of the new': the massive social and environmental dislocations brought on by the Industrial Revolution. Their art, in one way, constituted a desperate plea to restore respect for Nature, to realise the place of humanity within Nature, to warn of the terrible natural events if Nature were to be violated by an arrogant mankind. ● Of J.M.W. Turner, [fig.13] Malcolm Andrews has written: 'Turner's concern to embed himself in the experience of the play of natural forces, and to let that experience dictate the terms on which the landscape image is constructed is a new development in the relationship between the artist and the natural world'.<sup>1</sup> In that their art was focussed upon individual spiritual enlightenment, and that their nature was ideal, sublime and determinedly picturesque, the Romantic artists could not be considered as 'ecological artists' in the terms I have outlined.



Figure 13

**J.M.W. Turner**

*Snow Storm – Steam Boat off a Harbour's Mouth making Signals in Shallow Water, and going by the Lead. The Author was in this Storm on the night the Ariel left Harwich (1842)*

Oil on canvas

91.4 x 121.9cm

Tate Gallery, London

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<sup>1</sup> Andrews, M. (1999), *Landscape and Western Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p178.

Nevertheless, the Romantics could be seen as precursors of that ecological art which I have described. Indeed many contemporary wilderness photographs bear all the pictorial trappings, and aim for the same audience responses, as did the Romantics, particularly nineteenth century American landscape artists such as Frederic Church. [fig.14] Andrews, however, sees the problem of moving beyond the limitations of Romanticism as: 'the attempt to transmit the experience of nature as a constantly changing organism, not as a kind of grand-scale still life'.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 14

**Frederic Edwin Church (1826-1900)**  
*Twilight in the Wilderness* (1860)  
 Oil on canvas  
 101.6cm x 162.6cm  
 The Cleveland Museum of Art.

Without resorting to the visual rhetoric of Socialist Realism, large numbers of contemporary artists have embraced the notion that their art should address significant social issues. Pre-eminent among their concerns are issues concerning the environment. Despite contemporary artists in various parts of the world sharing similar values regarding the environment, there exist a diversity of artistic responses to it.

What came to be called 'Environmental Art', 'Earth Art', or 'Land Art' has paralleled the environmental movement itself over the past 30-40 years. These labels are virtually interchangeable. Andrews, for example, employs the term 'Earth

Art' and 'Land Art' interchangeably.<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Kastner mainly uses 'Land Art', but occasionally makes reference to 'Environmental Art', sometimes seeming to use the terms as synonyms and sometimes seeming to take 'Environmental Art' to be a subset of 'Land Art'.<sup>4</sup> In the discussion that follows I assume that these terms are interchangeable.

So-called Environmental Art has taken many forms – from the works of Christo and Jeanne-Claude to Smithson to Goldsworthy to Betty Beaumont<sup>5</sup>. In general, however, and in the artwork of each of the artists listed above, a defining characteristic of Environmental Art is that it constitutes a physical intervention within a specific, selected natural environment. Such an environment is not intended merely to provide a satisfactory 'backdrop' for the piece itself, however. The space around the work is inevitably transformed by virtue of the work's presence within it. The work's meaning derives not solely from forms actually fashioned by the artist, but from the juxtaposition of those forms with the natural forms and space of the given environment. To the environmental artist, the particular space in which a work is located is not neutral but, by virtue of the artist's intervention, becomes artistically activated, thus forming an integral part of the work's content. As such, a specific natural environment may be seen to provide both context and content for art.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p179.

<sup>3</sup> *Op.cit.*

<sup>4</sup> Kastner, J. (1998), 'Preface', in J. Kastner (ed.), *Land and Environmental Art*, Phaidon, London.

<sup>5</sup> Beaumont collaborated with marine scientists in her 1978 project *Ocean Landmark Project* where 510 tonnes of industrial waste material became an underwater sculptural installation. On Christo (and Jeanne-Claude) see Baume, N. (ed.) (1990), *Christo: The John Kaldor Art Project*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Beaver Press, Sydney; on Smithson see N. Holt (1979) (ed.), *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, New York University Press, New York; on Goldsworthy see A. Goldsworthy (1990), *Andy Goldsworthy*, Viking, London.

Kastner describes the genesis of Land Art in this way:

What began in the mid 1960s with a small number of committed conceptualists – disenchanted with the modernist endgame and animated by a desire to measure the power of the artwork isolated from the cosmopolitan commodifications of the white cube – has grown over the last thirty years to include widely diverging forms, approaches and theoretical positions. Like the work that it embraces, the term Land Art is variable, complex and fraught. In many ways a quintessentially American art form... yet its formulation involved artists from around the world... whether seen... as a purposefully romantic quest for reconnection with a kind of atavistic inspiration or a serious-minded programme for the practical conditions of the late-industrial biosphere.<sup>6</sup>

Many environmental artists connect their works intimately with their respective environments by utilising *objets trouvés* from the site itself. Much of the work is ephemeral and remotely located. This means that the crucial medium for dissemination of an artwork is the photographic documentation which inevitably accompanies it. But more problematic, in my opinion, is the fact that, while much environmental art may be ‘environmental’ in the sense that it takes place within the environment itself, it is not ‘ecological’ because it constitutes a harmful manipulation of, and imposition upon natural processes. As Andrews writes, this is art that has ‘taken many forms’, from ‘minimalist and ephemeral intervention in the site itself’ to ‘the larger-scale sculptural earth work involving heavy construction equipment’.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, even artworks at the ‘ephemeral’ end of the scale may leave a permanent footprint: ‘In many cases, the site itself has *become* the place where the original landscape is now irrecoverable because its shape has been manipulated, however minimally, by the artist’.<sup>8</sup> It may be that such art constitutes ‘altogether more intimate relations with the raw materials of the original’, but as

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp11-12.

<sup>7</sup> Andrews, *op.cit.*, p205.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p204.

Andrews observes, they are still ‘acts of intervention’.<sup>9</sup>

I have already indicated that, in my opinion, an art that seeks to engage authentically – that is, ‘ecologically’ – with the natural world must be an art that will have no lasting impact upon it. The work of many environmental artists, however, has the opposite effect – one of major impact.



Figure 15

**Christo and Jeanne-Claude**  
*Wrapped Coast* (1969)  
Erosion-control fabric, rope  
93 sq. km  
Little Bay, Australia

Christo’s art may be perceived as being located at the extreme ‘interventionist’ end of environmental art. [fig.15] Robert Smithson, however, may be considered the environment-modifying artist *par excellence*. [fig.16] To Smithson, art is an essentially interventionist activity; it is a tool-using enterprise, a ‘making-over’ of an ‘earth canvas’ in the name of art:

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p205. The artists that I will discuss below situate their work in the environment itself. There may be environmental artists who do not actually position their work physically in the environment – who remain within traditional gallery spaces, for example – but the environmental artists whose work is relevant to my own are those who work directly within the ‘real’ biophysical world.



One's mind and the earth are in a constant state of erosion, mental rivers wear away abstract banks, brain waves undermine cliffs of thought, ideas decompose into stones of unknowing and conceptual crystallisations break apart into deposits of gritty reason.<sup>10</sup>

Smithson's comment has poetic resonances, and may even evoke an earth-sensitive disposition, but a close reading of this passage reveals a view that privileges constant and radical change. Smithson is articulating a concept of the natural world that effectively justifies the interventionist praxis of his own art. He likens himself not to an observer but to a gardener; a constructor of the environment. Andrews describes the association of such art 'with a kind of macho aggression in which the violation of the earth with huge mechanical diggers was seen as a raw assertion of male authority over Mother Earth'<sup>11</sup>, whereas Smithson defends his art as "a direct organic manipulation of the land", akin to cultivation'.<sup>12</sup>



Figure 16

**Robert Smithson**  
*Spiral Jetty* (1970)  
 Rocks, earth, salt crystals, water  
 6,783 tonnes earth 1.450m; ø450  
 Great Salt Lake, Utah

<sup>10</sup> Smithson, R. (1998), 'A Sedimentation of the Mind: *Earth Projects* [1968]', in J. Kastner (ed.), *Land and Environmental Art*, Phaidon, London, p.211.

<sup>11</sup> Andrews, *op.cit.*, p.213.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*



What is at stake here are rival conceptions of the obligations of the artist to nature. For Smithson there are none – the ‘right’ of the creative human, equipped with transformative tools, is paramount and unqualified. For me, the nature of the global ecological crisis makes this decidedly Cartesian conception of the rights of the artist irresponsible and indefensible.

Another extreme interventionist is Michael Heizer. Though Heizer ‘has spoken of his sculptural work as a kind of language to re-establish dialogue with the earth’<sup>13</sup>, it is a most brutal and conflict-justifying dialogue that he sets up. His best known work, *Double Negative* (1969-70), [fig.18] is described by Kastner thus:

A massive 244,800 tons (244,800 tonnes) of earth was moved with the help of bulldozers which excavated from two sides from a valley wall. The displaced earth was banked up in front of the bulldozers to form two horizontal ramps. Commenting on the title, the artist stated, “in order to create this sculpture material was removed rather than accumulated... There is nothing there, yet it is still a sculpture”.<sup>14</sup>



Figure 17

**Michael Heizer**  
*Double Negative* (1969-70)  
 244,800 tonne displacement  
 Rhyolite, sandstone  
 457 x 15 x 9 m  
 Mormon Mesa, Overton, Nevada

However Heizer’s project may be defended in artistic terms, in terms of a view which asserts art’s (and humankind’s) ethical obligations to the natural world, his work would be instantly

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p212.

<sup>14</sup> Author not identified (1998), Untitled description of Heizer’s *Double Negative* [1969-70], in J. Kastner (ed.), *Land and Environmental Art*, Phaidon, London, p54.

disqualified. In fact, though Heizer works in the natural world and with natural materials, it is difficult to conceive of an art praxis more fundamentally at odds with nature.

Many environmental artists connect their work directly to the change agenda of the wider environment movement. Barbara Matilsky maintains that artists are in a unique position to change public attitudes toward the environment because they can synthesise new ideas in their images and communicate connections between many disciplines. In *Fragile Ecologies* (1992), Matilsky states:

... artists are... pioneering a holistic approach to problem solving that transcends narrow limits of specialization. Since art embodies freedom of thought, spirit and expression, its creative potential is limitless. Art changes the way people look at reality. In its most positive mode, art can offer alternative visions.<sup>15</sup>

Seeking transitional links between environmental art and my own, I would cite the art of Richard Long and Andy Goldsworthy respectively. Each of these artists has become progressively more ecologically aware, and each has adapted his art so that it has become increasingly considerate of the ecological values within the artwork's host environment.



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<sup>15</sup> Matilsky, B. (1992), *Fragile Ecologies: Contemporary Artists' Interpretations and Solutions*, Queens Museum of Art, Rizzoli, New York, p3.

Long has moved from making artworks which left large marks on the terrain – albeit the works were intended to be more or less transitory – to a much more ephemeral art, often consisting largely of the activity of walking.

He describes his art as ‘the antithesis of so-called American “Land Art”, where the artist needed... to claim possession of the land and to wield machinery. True capitalist art.’<sup>16</sup> And in an interview with Georgia Lobacheff, Long stated:

I call myself an artist. Nature is the source of my work. The medium of my work is walking (the element of time) and natural materials (sculpture). For me, the label ‘Land Art’ represents North American monumental earthworks, and my work has nothing to do with that.<sup>17</sup>

By contrast, he writes, ‘I like the idea of using the land without possessing it’.<sup>18</sup> [fig.18]

Goldsworthy is slightly more complex, because there is no clear period of transition from his more permanent, intrusive artworks – notably those working with historic stone structures in Cumbria – and his ephemeral pieces. I regard his permanent work positively, because it mostly avoids the problems I have already associated with environmental art. Andrews writes of Goldsworthy’s council-sponsored work, *Jack’s Fold* (1996): ‘It is part restoration, part Land-Art, part craft revival, and is emphatically linked to the community environment. It is an attempt to re-historicize in social and economic terms, a landscape’.<sup>19</sup> As Kenneth Baker writes, ‘Many of Goldsworthy’s Sheepfolds works are inconspicuous because they involve

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Andrews, *op.cit.*, p215.

<sup>17</sup> Long, R. (1998), *Mirage*, Phaidon, London, np.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Andrews, *op.cit.*, p215.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p218.

modifications to stone structures that remain in use, despite the new identity he has given them as works of sculpture'.<sup>20</sup> [fig. 19]

But it is his ephemeral pieces that have most strongly influenced my ideas on art as communication and on what constitutes an authentic praxis of ecological art.



Figure 19

**Andy Goldsworthy**  
*Sheep Folds Project* (1996) Detail  
One of The Fifteen Drove Stones  
Dry Stone  
Casterton, Cumbria

'At its most successful', Goldsworthy himself has written, 'my "touch" looks into the heart of nature; most days I don't even get close. These things are all part of a transient process that I cannot understand unless my touch is also transient'.<sup>21</sup>

A good example of this is *Ice Piece* (1987), [fig.20] a work which epitomises transience. Such works have been described thus:

Goldsworthy creates works in the landscape using found materials and processes... the works are often very short-lived and are recorded as photographs. Goldsworthy's interventions in nature heighten our awareness of the beauty of nature as well as its enduring and also ephemeral qualities.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Baker, K. (2000), 'Introduction', in A. Goldsworthy, *Wall*, Thames & Hudson, London, p15.

<sup>21</sup> Goldsworthy, A. (1990), *Andy Goldsworthy*, Viking, London, np.

<sup>22</sup> Author not identified (1998), Untitled description of Goldsworthy's 'Ice Piece', in J. Kastner (ed.), *Land and Environmental Art*, Phaidon, London, p69.



Figure 20

**Andy Goldsworthy**  
*Ice Piece* 7-8/10-11 January, 1987  
 Cibachrome photograph  
 76x76cm  
 Scaur Water, Penpont,  
 Dumfriesshire, Scotland.

Of particular relevance to this research has been the German artist, Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), for whom it was ‘self-evident that the political dimension should always form part of the unity of art and life’.<sup>23</sup> I have already discussed the importance of Beuys as a maker of ‘non-gallery’ art. Here I will confine myself to comment on his status as a precursor of ecological art.

Beuys possessed a profoundly ‘ecological’ view of the way humans are linked to the rest of the natural world, and he constructed an ecological conception of art on the basis of this insight. The ‘feeling of a primal oneness’ that Beuys sought to evoke in his art is best described by Peter-Klauss Schuster:

All of Beuys’ artistic actions and provocations were thus directed toward regenerating man’s creativity, submerged beneath the constant use of reason. Beuys hoped that the man whose creativity was thus revitalised would also develop a less

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<sup>23</sup> Staack, K. (1986), “‘Democracy is Fun’”, in T. Nevill (trans.), *Joseph Beuys: In Memory Joseph Beuys. Obituaries. Essays, Speeches, Inter Nationes*, Bonn, p12.

reified relationship with nature. He would no longer comprehend himself as an individual form of existence, disciplined and reduced by learnt skills, but rather as a creative element within an all-embracing organism or – viewed in terms of Renaissance ideas about nature – as a microcosm of a universal macrocosm.<sup>24</sup>

With his conception of human embeddedness in nature, Beuys extended his ecological conception of art to his art materials, working with ‘deliberately paltry materials such as felt, lard, dead animals and refuse...’, and investing these materials with ‘frankly provocative absurdity, so as to illustrate such extremely simple polar contrasts as heat and cold, recipient and transmitter, birth and death, feminine and masculine, and organic and crystalline’. There is no seam between Beuys’ concept of art and his concept of ecology: his ‘understanding of man and nature [is] derived from art and [from] organic rather than rational principles of thought’.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, this is a view of art that incorporates the sort of activist praxis that, as I have argued, is integral to ecological art. As Schuster says: ‘Beuys devoted himself from 1958 to saving man through art instead of self-realisation and thus the threat of self-destruction through science and technology’.<sup>26</sup>

In Chapter 3 I described the work of ecological thinkers who have made a case for a grounded spirituality. I also noted the influence of their thought upon my approach to art. Beuys’ ecological art praxis was suffused with a similar spirituality. Caroline Tisdall, for example, notes: ‘Beuys’ belief [was] that the human being is fundamentally a spiritual being, and that our vision of the world must be extended to encompass all the

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<sup>24</sup> Schuster, P-K. (1986), ‘Man as His own Creator: Dürer and Beuys – or the Affirmation of Creativity’, in T. Nevill (trans.), *Joseph Beuys: In Memory Josephy Beuys. Obituaries. Essays. Speeches*, Inter Nationes, Bonn, p19.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p20.



invisible energies with which we have lost contact, or from which we have become alienated.<sup>27</sup>

Much of the spiritual energy in nature is to be accessed through contact and communication with animals. 'They are fantastic entities and generators for the production of spiritual goods', Beuys wrote: 'They have soul powers, feeling powers, powers of instinct and orientation'.<sup>28</sup>



Figure 21

**Joseph Beuys**

*Coyote: I like America and America Likes Me. (1974)*

Action at the Galerie René Block,  
New York, 21-25 May 1974

Photograph by Lorraine Senna

Contact with such powers, Tisdall writes, must be re-established, because 'behind the power of each species stands the spirit of its group consciousness, or group soul'. Thus animals 'have preserved intact many of the abilities that are underdeveloped in the human species, or which had to be lost'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Tisdall, C. (1980), *Joseph Beuys: Coyote*, Schirmer/Mosel, Munich, p22.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p25.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

These principles were all in operation in one of Beuys' best known works, the performance piece, *Coyote: I like America and America Likes Me*, at the René Block Gallery, New York, in May 1974. [fig.21] Over the period of a week, Beuys ('the man') interacted with a coyote in an enclosed space. Tisdall describes it thus:

The man brought objects and elements from his world to place in this space, silent representatives of his ideas and beliefs. He introduced them to the coyote. The coyote responded coyote-style by claiming them with his gesture of possession. One by one as they were presented he pissed on them slowly and deliberately: felt, walking stick, gloves, flashlight and Wall Street Journal, but above all the Wall Street Journal... The man never took his eyes off the animal. The line of sight between them became like the hands of the spiritual clock measuring the timing of movements and setting the pace for the dialogue through time. The man carried out his sequence of movements, a choreography directed towards the coyote, the timing and the mood regulated by the animal... Man and animal grew closer together: it was as if they had always been there.<sup>30</sup>

The work is full of deeply symbolic interactions. The coyote, for example, was chosen because of the belief that the animal had arrived in North America as a companion of the peoples of the First Nations. As an exploration of the charged nature of the interchange between human being and nature the work is particularly poignant:

And then it was time to go. The man took the animal straw and scattered it slowly over the space. He took his leave of Little John, hugging him close without concealing the pain of separation... he was not there to see the coyote's reaction. Suddenly finding himself alone without the man's presence, Little John behaved for the first time like a caged and captive animal...<sup>31</sup>

This piece has had a major influence on my own work. It is almost an exemplar of what I am trying to achieve. Art here is a

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp20-22.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p22. I do have one misgiving about this project. Despite the spiritual bonding that Beuys achieved with 'Little John' the context in which this occurred was entirely of Beuys' choosing; that is, the relationship was structured entirely in accordance with the human's needs and the needs of the animal were neither known in advance nor ascertained.



communicative device; it is a medium of social exchange, both within the piece itself and between performance and viewing. And in its direct representation of human-animal interchange, and the potential contained within such interchange, it is also deeply spiritual and ecological.

Today, Beuys is considered a more important artist in a 'universal' sense than was the case during his lifetime, though he had a loyal band of followers in the 1970s and 1980s. Perhaps much of this early neglect stemmed from ignorance and/or prejudice against ecological art, or ecological orientations in art. In addition, Beuys' work was not saleable: he did not construct 'commodities', and much of his work – *Coyote*, for example – was specifically conceived as a temporary piece. Furthermore, much of his art did not occur in conventional gallery situations. In addition, there is a:

provocative lack of beauty and formlessness of so many of Beuys' productions, only a few of which can be termed works in the traditional sense. Beuys scared off many of his fellow-countrymen with his radical rejection of everything that could be termed art, a work, beautiful, or even classical...<sup>32</sup>

Other artists who have been important influences within my project are the Canberra-based Australian sculptor, Jill Peck, the group winners of the 1999 Governor of Osaka Prefecture Prize, and the Austrian sculptor, Robert Gschwantner.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Wiegand, W. (1986), 'The Message of Death: Joseph Beuys' Vision of Reality', in T. Nevill (trans.), *Joseph Beuys: In Memoriam Joseph Beuys. Obituaries. Essays. Speeches*, Inter Nationes, Bonn, p8.

<sup>33</sup> In relation to this research, I have considered the various modes of visual communication employed by the Australian, Megan Jones, and the Americans, Betty Beaumont and Newton and Helen Harrison in their response to aquatic problems. I am also interested in the photographer Allan Sekula, who also makes metaphoric use of the shipping container. (Sekula, A. (1996), *Fish Story*, Richter Verlag, Dusseldorf). Again, due to limitations of space I have reluctantly omitted a consideration of the work of the artists noted here.

Jill Peck's sculptural works are of particular relevance to this research. Peck is a public artist who works collaboratively with scientists, and with oceanographic themes. Peck employs a similar range of materials to those which I have used in my earlier work – for example, cables, boating shackles and fixtures, stainless steel and aluminium. Whilst I have engaged in collaborative work with CSIRO, she has worked with the Australian Geological Survey Organisation's seismic scientific data in an installation for the Canberra National Sculpture Forum (1995). In this way, she effectively closes the gap that distances much scientific exploration from a general audience, while her personal communication with the scientist in his own arena serves to bridge the gap between scientific and artistic understandings.

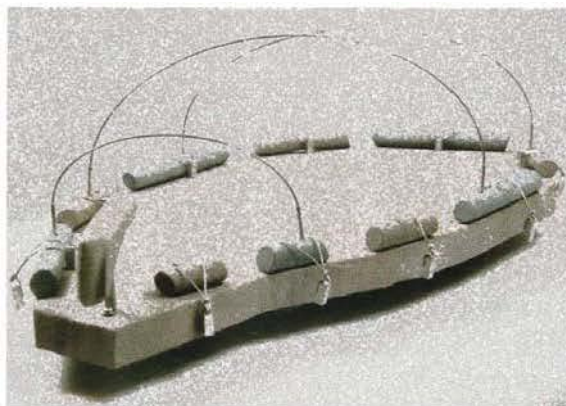


Figure 22

**Jill Peck**

*Undercurrent* (1999)

Etched sandstone, marine stainless steel

12 x 6 m

Dorian Photographics

In *Undercurrent* (1999), Peck etches within sandstone:

Seismic profiles taken of the earth underneath the Arafura Sea, the submerged land bridge between Australia and Asia. These graphic striations are deduced from results collected from ultrasound measurement along the ocean floor...by contrast to their timeless subject, these scientific recordings have a transient material life. Jill Peck's monumental recovery of these lines stakes a claim on different territory – the common

aesthetic ground that underlies all representational pursuits, whether in the laboratory or studio.<sup>34</sup>

The sandstone blocks are in the shape of upturned boats, and boats of stone are recurrent motifs in her work. Ecological degradation below the surface of the ocean is often overlooked by virtue of the fact that it remains hidden from general view. In *Undercurrents*, Peck reveals hidden complexities. Her work is motivated by similar concerns and issues to those which have influenced my own work, and it explores similar boundaries to the explorations undertaken within this research. As such, Peck's success in achieving her aims provides me with confidence in the value of ecologically-driven projects and the validity of my own praxis.

In 1999, in the Ninth International Design Competition, the Governor of Osaka Prefecture Prize was awarded to a work entitled *Territories of Interwoven Genetic Design*. [fig.23] The competition website describes the work thus:

a vast living textile covers over what was a polluted and unused industrial harbour and is now transformed through biotechnology into a unique and animated ecosystem. Interweaving the organic with the artificial, the sublime with the urban life, this designed living system is a new territory of inhabitation and experience.<sup>35</sup>

The work is a collaboration between two Canadian architects, Aniko Meszaros and Sean Hanna, and an England-based molecular microbiologist, Donald A. Cowan.

None of the *Territories of Interwoven Genetic Design* collaborators is an artist in the conventional sense of the word,

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<sup>34</sup> Murray, K. (1999), 'The Art of Inner Space', in *métis: Exhibitions of Science and Art, National Science Week, Canberra, May 1999*, CSIRO, Canberra, p23.

<sup>35</sup> Governor of Osaka Prefecture Prize

Accessed online 13/6/02

[http://www.jidpo.or.jp/jdf/competition/9c/9c\\_03e.html](http://www.jidpo.or.jp/jdf/competition/9c/9c_03e.html)

and this is not, in a conventional sense, a work of art. It is a biotechnological 'invention'. The website describes it thus:

The biological textile creates new growth-accelerated and responsive species that can float, support human weight, repair themselves, transform and adapt to inhabitation of both animal and human and flower when touched... Single celled organisms are genetically combined with DNA characteristics of land plants and local samples to invent species with engineered site-specific behaviours and responses. The environmental distribution of the macrophytes is carried out through a floating pasteurised cable network where final engineered characteristics in the continuing cycle occurs: a chemical catalyst is sent through the network triggering organism reproduction to change from dividing single-cells into a system of filamentous branching plants which grow into a complex and diverse woven surface.<sup>36</sup>



Figure 23

Aniko Meszaros, Sean Hanna, Donald Cowan  
*Territories of Interwoven Genetic Design*  
Governor of Osaka Prefecture Prize.

This project was seen by the Osaka jury as a 'positive experimental attempt to improve the current situation in terms of environmental conservation, and to solve environmental problems for the future'.<sup>37</sup> Art considerations are nowhere mentioned. But I would contend that an important characteristic of ecological art is that it challenges conceptions as to what constitutes art, of what the social role of the artist is, and of where the boundaries lie between artwork and other modes of social expression. In Dewey's view of art as an integral element of

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[http://www.jidpo.or.jp/jdf/competition/9c/9c\\_03e.html](http://www.jidpo.or.jp/jdf/competition/9c/9c_03e.html)

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

society and its processes, old boundaries wither away. *Territories of Interwoven Genetic Design* is a collaboration, on ecological issues, between design and science – and it is strongly visual, though not conventionally beautiful. It is a project, then, that challenges and extends concepts of art. *Territories of Interwoven Genetic Design* has influenced my consideration of what may be deemed an acceptable methodology or mode of communication within an art practice.

Robert Gschwantner also employs themes of marine degradation. His work consists of what he calls ‘oil carpets’: ‘labour intensive, technically brilliant and ephemerally beautiful works [that] resemble rugs or mats made from woven PVC tubing’, and named for sunken oil tankers and other marine pollution disasters, ‘names that instantly conjure up pictures of environmental havoc’.<sup>38</sup> Again, given the close parallels between Gschwantner’s intentions and my own – specifically, in reference to matters of marine ecological degradation – his work is of considerable importance to me. Like myself, he has focused upon problems associated with shipping. In his *mêtis-Wasted* 2001 work, *Erika* (2000), Gschwantner uses:

commercially available, brightly coloured oils to make works that shimmer in the light, causing beauty and poison. *Erika...* is made from 1,000 metres of tubing cut into 12,500 pieces and filled with high speed motor oil from Total, the company responsible for the Erika’s spill.<sup>39</sup>

Gschwantner’s work is formed out of seductively beautiful materials which induce an aesthetic response on the part of the viewer. A recurring objection to an artist’s deployment of forms which possess a ‘beauty’ in order to bring attention to subject matter that is not, however, inherently ‘beautiful’ is that it is not possible – or even ethical – to evoke the desired feelings of

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<sup>38</sup> Turner, J. (2001), ‘Oiling the Works’, in B. Nogrady (ed.), *mêtis 2001: Wasted*, CSIRO, Dickson (ACT), p27.

<sup>39</sup> Barney, J. (2001), ‘Wasted’, *Artlink*, vol. 21, no. 1, p65.

dismay, disgust or anger *through* 'beauty'. I consider, however, that once a person has responded to an artwork aesthetically, they are thereby opened up to meanings on a range of levels – including conceptions of the 'un-beautiful'. The cliché of 'a terrible beauty' describes, perhaps, the essence of the sublime, an archetypal artistic aspiration. Gschwantner's work draws attention to the contrast between conventional beauty and real-world degradation. As such, I believe, his work has political resonance.



Figure 24

**Robert Gschwantner**  
*Erika* (2000)  
PVC tubing, motor oil  
Size unknown  
Photograph by Paolo Cipolina

Gschwantner continues to exhibit mainly within galleries, but the nature of his themes and materials, and the effectiveness of his deployment of a language of visual aesthetics as effective political communication, make his work of intense interest to me.

Within this chapter I have acknowledged and described environmental and ecological artists whose work provides a context within which my research may be located. In Chapter 5, I discuss my own work and define the contribution this research makes to the field of visual art.



## CHAPTER 5

### My Research and its Component Artworks

#### How the Research Developed: Praxis and Strategies

The artworks which I have produced in this research should be seen not simply as ends in themselves, but as components of more complex projects. Thus I have described my research activities and outcomes not as art *works* as such, but as art *projects*. My research concerns an application of art beyond art itself, and it is here, in its development of communicative strategies and synergistic relationships with industry, science and the community, that it seeks to add to our understanding of potential applications of art, notably, in my case, in respect of the marine environment.

In the following account of the processes which have led to my artistic outcomes, I discuss how works have been conceived and the evolution of their form, content and meaning. I also describe processes other than of the purely artistic kind: networking and negotiations, technical, personnel and venue-specific issues, for example. Though these considerations may seem relatively mundane and outside the scope of ‘pure’ artistic research, they have been highly significant factors in the conceptualisation and realisation of my artworks. Lucy Lippard has written that ‘activist art is, above all, process oriented’, one in which art is an ‘engagement... a mutually stimulating dialogue’.<sup>1</sup> Thus I consider both dimensions – the logistic as well as the artistic – to be central components of my methodology: ‘methodology’ referring to the means by which research outcomes have been achieved.

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<sup>1</sup> Lippard, L. (1984), ‘Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power’, in B. Wallis [ed.], *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, p343.

I have also argued that the integrity of the process is as fundamental as the final product to an authentically *ecological* art. For this reason, too, much of what follows concentrates on process; how individual art projects have come into being, how they have fitted within a coherent wider project, how networks have been established that link individual art projects, and how strategies for ecological communication through art have evolved and been adapted to contextual circumstances. In some cases the process has been an unusually prolonged one, with years passing between genesis and realisation. Some are ongoing. Thus an account of my research that eschews explanation of its strategic and process dimensions would be deficient.

Earlier in the dissertation I described my view of the social function of art. I also outlined impulses and influences stemming from formative experiences in my background that conduced to the development of an ecological commitment, and specifically to a concern for ecological issues that bear upon the wellbeing of the marine environment. The conjunction of these views on art and ecology constitutes my art praxis.

In the course of my search for appropriate artistic modes I have deployed various processes and media. My undergraduate work was largely within printmaking, and when I began this project I envisaged remaining within this medium. I produced large-scale mixed-media prints in installation-type formats, but came to perceive limitations in this mode. Having mounted and reflected upon my own gallery exhibitions, I considered that a socially-focussed art must reach a larger, non art-specialist public if it is to achieve its aims. This led to my moving away from printmaking and seeking expressive modes more suited to alternative public space exhibition.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Earlier in the exegesis I discussed the issues involved in public, as opposed to gallery, exhibition.



I subsequently worked with a range of mixed-media and 'new media' technologies, as I explored different modes and strategies for adapting the visual language of art to concerns of marine ecology. In the process I had to master a new and technologically challenging range of equipment, setting up a studio on an entirely new and unfamiliar basis. I had to learn – and rapidly – a new range of logistical variables to do with the suitability of venues. More than that, I was forced to acknowledge that it was not simply a question of finding a venue to suit the art. Rather, the venue itself was a key *determinant* of the artistic mode, and indeed of the total art project. Hence, much of my work has been site-specific, and, in order that it not transgress my self-imposed strictures on the need for ecological art to tread lightly, I have had to be especially vigilant in assessing the extent to which my work has the potential to alter characteristics of the site in the longer term. As well as the need to become more skilled in forms of art technology and relevant software, I have required the input of others with expertise in the more technologically-complex processes.

The nature of my project has also necessitated my working with non-art professionals, particularly scientists involved in relevant issues of marine ecology. Ballast dumping – the particular focus of my research – is not only an issue of global import; it is also an issue of specific relevance to Tasmania. The CSIRO Marine Division, the National Oceans Office, and the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) all have their headquarters in Hobart.

The issue of collaboration assumed major importance, much more so than I could have predicted. I have already discussed the extent to which an ecologically-focussed project is philosophically conducive to the concept of

collaboration<sup>3</sup>. Within my evolving praxis of ecological art, collaboration became an important enterprise in its own right.

My research has had to contend with numerous obstacles of a non-artistic kind. During the course of my project I have encountered scepticism regarding the potential of art and the artist to influence values within the larger community, as well as toward art's communicative capacity. There have also been substantial logistical problems, which must be accepted as normal for artists working in the public domain. Public art requires high-visibility settings (because such art is pointless unless it is seen by large numbers of people). These may not be available, nor may they be adaptable to specific artistic purposes. The nature of the setting may thus significantly constrain artistic possibilities, as do costs and technical difficulties involving use of equipment. Short-term crises may arise requiring the intervention of additional, uninitiated (and uninvited) personnel – who then become unwitting collaborators in the production of an artwork. Finally, in this discussion of praxis and strategies, I should indicate the two principal audience cohorts that I have sought to reach through my public art projects: namely, decision-makers from the spheres of industry and science on the one hand, and the wider public on the other.

### **Description of the Component Artworks**

From my discussion of praxis and strategies it will be clear that a major challenge of this research has been that of presenting my artworks in broad public settings. The several projects described below, employing as they do different visual art modes, should

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<sup>3</sup> In the collaborations I discuss here, the role of the visual artist – a role described earlier as that of a creative interlocutor – is highly demanding, subtle, and variable from context to context. In my work 'collaboration' can apply to a complex of relationships with artists who work in non-visual creative modes, with scientists, with people in industry, and with public sector managers. When referring to non-art collaborations (with industry, for example) I have occasionally had recourse to the term 'partnership'. Outside the parameters of this research, and in the future, I would like to be involved in art collaborations that are more genuinely partnerships.

be seen essentially as different strategies for the presentation of an ecologically-motivated art.

During my Honours year (1998), much of my artwork had been presented in site-specific ‘non-art’ settings, specially-selected locations within which decisions were being made on issues concerning the marine environment. These locations – all in Hobart – included Parliament House, the Tasmanian State Government Offices, the Marine Board Building and the Marine Research Division of the CSIRO, where I mounted my final Honours exhibition. This activity enabled me to forge links with industrial and statutory stakeholders concerned with marine ecosystems.

On commencing my PhD studies, I registered a business, ‘Q-Ecology’. This was necessary if I was to seek external funds, and, I considered, if I was to be accorded credibility by the industry interests with which I sought partnerships. In stating Q-Ecology’s mission, I promoted the development of productive relationships with scientific and industrial interests involved in the issues concerning the marine ecosystem. Through contemporary artwork presented in ‘non-art’ settings, and often in collaboration with other creative personnel, Q-Ecology set out to raise an awareness of marine ecology in the wider community, and to demonstrate the positive role that art could play in the promotion of environmental responsibility. These aims were set out in a brochure.

In March 1999 I took the brochure to ‘Ballast Water: Where to from Here’, a ground-breaking international conference<sup>4</sup> held in Brisbane. Here I renewed important contacts previously made at the Australian Ballast Water Management Council meeting in

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<sup>4</sup> This was the first time in seven years that the global scientific/technological community had come together to establish the baseline position concerning ballast water management and to determine the nature of the international regime that needed to be put in place in the years ahead.

Canberra which I had attended in 1998. My attendance at this second conference seemed to have convinced other delegates that my commitment was serious and ongoing. Present were Michael Julian, Chairman of the London-based International Maritime Organisation's Maritime Environmental Protection Council (MEPC); Dr. Meryl Williams, Director-General of ICLARM, the World Fish Center [sic], based in Malaysia; Dr. Rex Pyne, Deputy Commissioner of Fisheries in the Northern Territory; Associate Professor Gustaaf Hallegraeff of the University of Tasmania's School of Plant Science; CoastCare personnel; several CSIRO marine scientists; and members of the Aquaculture Council of Tasmania. With each of these parties a working relationship was put in place, and these have resulted in most of the projects that have subsequently constituted the work for this research.

In addition to the productive networking that occurred at this conference – and that, in effect, set up the terms and conduct of my research – I also made a poster presentation in which I outlined a case for the role of the artist as a creative interlocutor within environmental problem-solving processes, and for the educational and communicative potential of art when important issues of water quality are taken into the public domain. [fig.25] My poster consisted of a computer-generated detail of an installation made prior to the current research period. The central image is a detail of an electron microscope photograph of a dinoflagellate, colour-enhanced, while the others include a marine engineering 'wire-boat' image of a container ship, typical of the type to have built-in ballast tanks.

The success of the Q-Ecology brochure as an introductory device led me to produce three additional brochures, each on the issue of Optimum Water Quality, but 'customised' for a distinct audience: tourism, industry, and 'general', respectively.

On at least two subsequent occasions during the course of my research I initiated communicative strategies that, in themselves,

constituted important sub-projects within the overall research. As with the 1999 Brisbane conference, these activities were crucial for my subsequent art projects' realisation.



Figure 25

**Jane Quon**

*Ballast Trade 11* (1999) (detail)

'Ballast Water Where To From Here' Conference

Brisbane, March 1999

60 x 85cm (image variable)

First, at the beginning of 2000, I again contacted Michael Julian. Based in Canberra, Mr. Julian holds important positions with both the International Maritime Organisation and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA). Discussions were also held with Analisse Caston, Adviser in Policy and Regulatory Environmental Protection Standards with the IMO, regarding opportunities for future art-promotional projects on the theme of marine ecosystems, and to obtain information on national and international organisations with similar charters.<sup>5</sup> Discussions were also held with personnel from the Penang-based international environmental NGO, the World Fish Center,[sic] at the time known as the International Center for Living Aquatic Marine Resource Management (ICLARM). My research took me to Penang for discussions with Dr. Meryl Williams, Director-General of the organisation, and other senior personnel. Two ambitious art projects developed as a consequence of these meetings. One was a commission to provide artworks for the

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<sup>5</sup> These contacts provided information on forthcoming international events and the possibility of mounting art projects in association with these. I decided to target one of the IMO conventions to be held in London in 2001 and 2002. I also visited and entered into dialogue with the Hellenic Maritime Environmental Protection Association (HELMEPA), a national education program in Greece concerned with water quality, with a view to developing artworks for installation at relevant locations in Greece in the future.

World Fish Center's new Penang Headquarters then about to be built; the other was to develop artworks 'in the field' as strategies for ecological communication.<sup>6</sup> I assess the outcomes of my own negotiations as overwhelmingly positive. From them, I was able to establish partnerships which would constitute a contextual framework for my developing an art of ecological communication.

More recently, from 2-5 July 2002, I attended the interdisciplinary Environment, Culture and Community Conference at the University of Queensland, where I was invited to make a joint presentation within the program segment, 'Raising Environmental Awareness through Art'. My presentation was entitled 'An Application of Multimedia Art to Marine Ecosystem Degradation'.<sup>7</sup> The conference provided numerous contacts within the humanities disciplines, which have complemented the more industry-based and science-oriented networks established at earlier conferences.

## **Art Project 1**

### ***The Enemy Below:***

### ***The Black Striped Mussel Invasion of Darwin***

The first artwork to be realised as an outcome of the contacts made in Brisbane in 1999 was an art event, *The Enemy Below: The Black Striped Mussel Invasion of Darwin* (1999).<sup>8</sup> In this deployment of the art event as a communicative strategy, the aim

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<sup>6</sup> A documentation film and slides of visitation to the World Fish Center headquarters and the initial stages of my artwork are included in the DVD that accompanies this exegesis as part of the documentation for my submission, associated material is also included in the hard copy folio.

<sup>7</sup> The presentation was a collaboration with Lindsay Broughton, and comprised the presentation of a formal paper along with the screening of my video pieces. These included in particular my most recent – *Marine Incursion* – as presented to the IMO in London in March 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Excerpts of *'The Enemy Below'* are included in the DVD that accompanies this exegesis as part of the documentation for my submission, and associated material is included in the hard copy folio.



was to demonstrate that educational strategies other than the conventional lecture presented by a particular expert could effectively demonstrate such issues as the March 1999 invasion of three Darwin marinas by an introduced marine pest, the black striped mussel (*Mytilopsis sallei*).<sup>9</sup>

During the 1999 Brisbane conference, Dr. Rex Pyne, Deputy Commissioner of Fisheries in the Northern Territory, delivered a riveting speech on the then-recent black striped mussel invasion in Darwin Harbour. I subsequently invited him to come to Hobart to make a similar presentation as part of an art event for senior secondary students<sup>10</sup>. He accepted – and became the first of numerous prominent individuals in the areas of science, statutory authority, industry and local government to support this research.

For the subsequent multimedia event, the challenge was to find a form of presentation that seemed appropriate for the 17-18 years age group, in terms of media, imagery, sound, lighting, and

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<sup>9</sup> On 29 March 1999 the highly invasive salt-water zebra mussel, *Mytilopsis sallei* was discovered in plague proportions at Cullen Bay and Tipperary Waters Marinas in Darwin in the Northern Territory. The marine pest was introduced on the hull of a pleasure boat moored in Francis Bay Marina, and was discovered in a routine check of the area by the Centre of Research for Introduced Marine Pests (CRIMP) of the Tasmanian Division of CSIRO. Quarantine measures were set in place: 260 tons of liquid sodium hypochlorite and 9 tons of copper sulphate were used for eradication. Environmentally, such an eradication strategy was radical, but, against the potentially catastrophic disaster to the natural ecology of Australia's waters and the economic consequences of the pearl fishing industry in the Northern Territory, it was considered a risk worth taking. The costs of the eradication exercise were in excess of \$2.6 million. Implementation for the response fell to the Deputy Commissioner of Fisheries, Dr. Rex Pyne, who instigated changes in legislation for the procedure. The situation was unique in that the species could be contained within locked marinas where dealing with the situation was made possible. National response mechanisms have since been negotiated. While the black striped mussel experience may have been traumatic, the challenges we face in the future are even larger. This event has been recognised globally as a world first in management practice for an introduced pest within foreign waters. Accessed online 18/5/99: [http://www.nt.go.au/news/cullen\\_bay\\_interstate.shtml](http://www.nt.go.au/news/cullen_bay_interstate.shtml)

<sup>10</sup> The art event was specifically devised for an audience of year 11/12 art students from Southern Tasmanian schools and colleges.

overall design, or 'choreography'. Specifically, the event involved video, computer, music and sound, presented in both pre-recorded and live formats with two scripted and separate live presentations, by Dr. Pyne and myself respectively. I intended the presentation to evoke a feeling of immediacy and spontaneity, with improvisation a feature.



Figure 26

**Jane Quon**

*The Enemy Below: The Black Striped Mussel  
Invasion of Darwin (1999)*

Performance, video, computer and sound

Still image from video documentation

●original video still ● Mick Baron

Because of the complexity of an event presented 'live', two additional collaborating artists (video artist Sean Bacon and computer technician/artist Ken Ford) manipulated and improvised with imagery sourced by myself<sup>11</sup>, at the same time that Dr Pyne and I, in turn, made live verbal presentations. Dr. Pyne, albeit a senior public service manager and a distinguished scientist, enthusiastically assumed the role of 'performance artist' within the event. As such, he too functioned as an extremely willing and highly effective collaborator. In the early stages of the event, I sought advice and support from local scientists – from CSIRO, the Tasmanian Museum and Art

<sup>11</sup> Licence for the imagery was obtained from the Black Mussel Incursion site on the internet, from CSIRO's Centre for Research into Introduced Marine Pests, from Mick Baron at the Eaglehawk Dive Centre, from Karen Gowlett-Holmes and from the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.



Gallery, the Hobart City Council and the private sector. These contacts have been maintained and re-activated in later projects.

The forty-five minute public presentation, which took place in the University of Tasmania's Centre for the Arts Lecture Theatre, consisted of pre-recorded 'clean' underwater imagery<sup>12</sup>, pre-recorded imagery of the Darwin emergency itself, and pre-recorded images of Dr. Pyne speaking. This enabled the presentation to move between real-time and slowed-down speech which effects served to heighten the dramatic import of Dr. Pyne's message. I sought to present him as a 'larger-than-life', even heroic figure, a scientist combating an alien invasion. His image on the screen was imposing and extremely powerful, and he 'crossed the line' from expert/lecturer and senior public servant to performance artist with great aplomb. [fig.27]

When the coloured images were projected onto Dr. Pyne and beyond to the sail-shaped screen, a silhouette of the performer and lectern produced an unexpected synergy. They were no longer static props to the commentary, but integral parts of the projection. Dr. Pyne stood at a lectern at centre-right, with three live black-and-white surveillance cameras fixed upon him.<sup>13</sup> A switching box allowed the video operator (Sean Bacon) to move between video and any of the three live cameras. The switching device was deliberately crude, so as to produce a static effect that would convey an immediacy, a spontaneity, a feeling that the event was not, for all the pre-recording, an ordained happening. My intention was to capture a sense of urgency.

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<sup>12</sup> Seven of these images were later screenprinted and digitally printed for exhibition in *Ecological Manipulations* and are described later in the exegesis.

<sup>13</sup> A description of equipment used in this project is given in Appendix 3



Figure 27

Jane Quon

*The Enemy Below: The Black Striped Mussel  
Invasion of Darwin (1999)*

Performance, video, computer and sound  
Still image from video documentation

The event concluded with my own presentation, [fig 28] in which I explained my role as an ecological artist and my wider artistic project (see Appendix 3). The event was preceded by an ABC radio interview with myself and Dr. Pyne, and a newspaper article<sup>14</sup>. Such media offshoots have constituted additional communicative strategies for subsequent projects.



Figure 28

Jane Quon

*The Enemy Below: The Black Striped Mussel  
Invasion of Darwin (1999)*

Performance, video, computer and sound  
Still image from video documentation

An art event based upon Dr. Pyne's Darwin experiences, but presented in Hobart, drew attention to the global nature of a marine pest incursion. It also highlighted particular problems

<sup>14</sup> Pos, M. (1999), 'Artists Draw Attention to Eco Woe', *Mercury, The* (Hobart), 10 August.

facing Tasmania should a similar invasion occur.<sup>15</sup> As a strategy that utilised art as communication, this art event successfully contributed to my wider project.<sup>16</sup>

From conversations I have had as much as two years later with young people who had attended the event, it appears that the impact of *The Enemy Below* upon its audience – and their capacity to take meaning and information from the fast-moving images employed – was considerable. I am keen to return to performance as a major component within some modal mix and to re-deploy the art ‘event’ as a communicative strategy.

## Art Project 2

### *Ecological Manipulations*

At the beginning of my PhD program, in early 1999, my project received a ‘seeding grant’, in which the University of Tasmania agreed to match a \$2000 industry grant under a University/Tasmanian aquaculture industry collaborative research project. The industry support was obtained from the Aquaculture Council of Tasmania.<sup>17</sup>

The exhibition that was the outcome of the Art/Industry partnership, *Ecological Manipulations*, took the form of printmaking and print/installation and was a joint exhibition (though not a collaboration as such) with one other artist. The

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<sup>15</sup> A similar invasion within our own waters would be catastrophic without the advantage of locked marinas (as in Darwin), or if the chemical intervention which was successfully used in Darwin was not available – or approved.

<sup>16</sup> A positive outcome was that the Aquaculture Council of Tasmania requested that *The Enemy Below* be presented a second time, for the general public. The Lord Mayor of Hobart recommended repeat performances over several nights. Video documentation of the event subsequently proved to be of great promotional value. For example, it was instrumental in securing permission for the *Pelagic Projections* project at the international CSIRO *métis-Wasted* exhibition in Canberra in 2001 (see Art Project 5, below).

<sup>17</sup> The Art/Industry seeding grant provided the basis for applications for an Australian Research Council Small Grant and, later, a larger SPIRT Grant.

exhibition was held in the Hobart City Council's Carnegie Gallery in October 1999.

The dual aims of the project were to test the potential of the conventional art gallery situation, and the capacity of printmaking,<sup>18</sup> to serve the ecological communication purposes of my project. My artistic aim was to produce images evocative of facets of the marine ecosystem.

In some ways this project developed as a consequence of *The Enemy Below*, some of the print images being taken from this event and reformatted for *Ecological Manipulations*.



Figure 29



Figure 30



Figure 31

Jane Quon

29. *Comb Jelly* (1999)

30. *Jelly Tendril* (1999)

31. *Fish School* (1999)

Inket on canvas

Each image 172cm x 123cm

Original video stills © Mick Baron

*Fish School* (1999), [fig.31] *Jelly Tendril* (1999) [fig.30] and *Comb Jelly* (1999) [fig.29] formed a suite of large-format (123cm x 72cm), computer manipulated images<sup>19</sup>, digitally printed onto canvas. The prime objective of these pieces was to serve as a foil for *It Will Never Be Fished Out* (discussed below). Against the dire message conveyed in the latter print, the clean images of creatures in clear, unpolluted water that comprise this suite serve as reminders of what we stand to lose. At the same time, through the size of these works, surface reflection, suggestions of transparency and ephemerality, along with the enhanced blue of

<sup>18</sup> The art mode to which I was, at the time, primarily committed.

<sup>19</sup> These images were obtained from underwater footage taken by Mick Baron, an underwater videographer, in the waters of the East Coast of Tasmania.

the water, I sought to evoke a sense of the vast expanse of the underwater world: the void and majesty of life beneath the sea.

*Cloisonné Jelly* (1999) [fig.32] and *Hand Fish* (1999) [fig.33] are images digitally printed on canvas. These are images of organisms native to Tasmanian waters and found in places where exotic species have already been sighted.

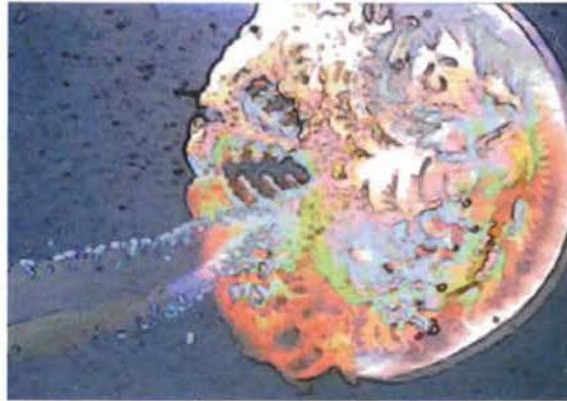


Figure 32

**Jane Quon**  
*Cloisonné Jelly* (1999)  
Inkjet on canvas  
60cm x 110cm  
Original video still © Mick Baron



Figure 33

**Jane Quon**  
*Hand Fish* (1999)  
Inkjet on canvas  
47cm x 65cm  
Original video still © Mick Baron

*Sea of Tranquility - Moon Jelly* (1999) [fig.34] was developed using a four-colour process and screenprinted onto slightly textured Arches 120 gsm paper. I experienced a sense of detachment and remoteness in the digital printing process and was eager to return to the more hands-on tangibility of traditional printmaking. I endeavoured through this process to capture a sensitivity that I felt I could not capture with digital printing. Inspired by the calligrapher's brush, the effect I was seeking to



achieve in the print was that of the soft ink wash suggestive of traditional Chinese or Japanese watercolour. I hoped to convey the delicate transparency, beauty and movement of the jellyfish and to evoke a sense of being under the water.



Figure 34

**Jane Quon**

*Sea of Tranquility - Moon Jelly* (1999)

Screenprint on paper

47cm x 65cm

●original video still © Mick Baron

*Rex Pyne: Total Eradication* (1999), contrasted sharply with *Moon Jelly*. A series of eight prints, each derived from a different still image recorded by a surveillance camera during Rex Pyne's presentation, formed the installation. The individual components, each consisting solely of an image of his face, were single colour screenprints on galvanised steel plate. Included as text in the installation were phrases taken from the script of *The Enemy Below: The Black Striped Mussel Invasion of Darwin*. [fig.35] The face, though repeated, was slightly different in expression in each of the eight elements which made up the work. I sought an allusion to a film strip, the grainy images evoking raw, uncut surveillance footage. Even the open mouth was intended to suggest cinematic movement.

Each image was printed in black onto metal so that the effect was harsh and cold – I wanted no hint of softness in the print. The words 'Total Eradication' and '...But We Had Not Yet

Informed...’, included as text, were intended to express a sense of urgency. Indeed, in ‘real-life’ terms, the dramatic, last-resort chemical warfare regime that Dr. Pyne was forced to implement in Darwin Harbour was an extremely urgent measure. The imposing presence of Dr. Pyne’s head from *The Enemy Below* had remained in my consciousness. I sought to transpose this presence from film onto print.

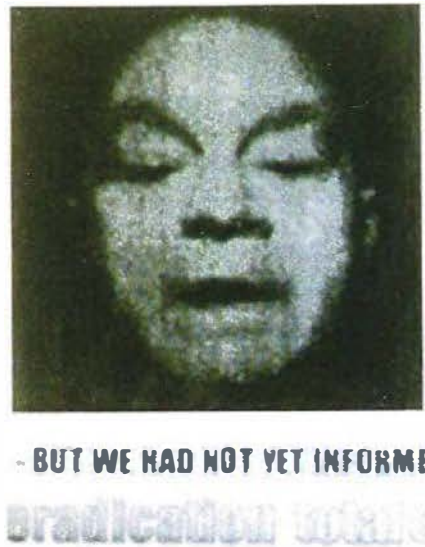


Figure 35

Jane Quon

*Rex Pyne: Total Eradication* detail (1999)

Screenprint on paper

65cm x 47cm

My major piece in the *Ecological Manipulations* exhibition was entitled *It Will Never Be Fished Out* (1999). The title was taken from the Report of the 1893 *Royal Commission into Fishing Practices in Tasmania*, in which precisely that statement was made in reference to the island’s then-prolific rock lobster resource. The prediction proved to be catastrophically inaccurate. So bountiful were rock lobsters at the time of the Report that fishermen actually used them as bait for catching other fish. I employed the phrase, ‘It Will Never Be Fished Out’, as an ironic reference to an all-too-common complacency within fishing practices.

The work serves as a salutary reminder of the outcomes of over-exploitation of aquatic resources and points to the need for fishing

practices that are sustainable. As well as implying the need for heightened social awareness and sound management practices in relation to fishing, the installation also refers to the crucial role of scientific research in the realisation of sustainability and increased stock.



Figure 36

**Jane Quon**

*It Will Never be Fished Out* (1999) detail

Mixed media print

140 x 730 x 45cm (max. d)

●original photograph Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery

The back-lit circular section within each of eight 140 x 160 centimetre panels carries a digitally enhanced microscopic image of *Philosoma*, (the early stage in the life of the rock lobster), [fig.36] while the large black image screenprinted onto the stainless steel in each panel is of a projection microscope. The piece is accompanied by an 'interpretation panel', consisting of a screen-printed reproduced page from the 1893 Royal Commission's Report.

In each of the eight panels, the image of the projection microscope has been screenprinted onto 0.6mm stainless steel and mounted onto 6mm MDF board. Inkjet prints sandwiched between perspex discs and back-lit by halogen globes were suspended on an electrical trapeze. Steel rulers and galvanised steel fittings and cable were additional components of the piece.<sup>20</sup> Each of the eight perspex shelves upon which the panels sat carries, as text, the line: 'It Will Never Be Fished Out'. The text has been created from a computer font, but screenprinted



onto each shelf. Light was projected through the shelf from the gallery track lighting, resulting in the words appearing as a shadow text immediately below the shelf.



Figure 38

**Jane Quon**

*It Will Never Be Fished Out* (1999) detail

Mixed media print

140 x 730 x 45cm (max. d)

The shelves were placed at eye level so that attention would be drawn to the words appearing on the wall under each shelf, rather than to the actual printed words on the shelves themselves. The effect I sought was a sensation of enigma and mystery; a linking of layers from a remembered past to a present crisis, and a sense of foreboding as to what might reside in the future. I also wished to evoke an impression of harshness, this time suggested by the austere, linear black images printed on the cold gunmetal grey steel plate. The microscope images, with their figurative connotations, were portrayed on a larger-than-life scale, the total length of the installation being almost seven metres. The main components of the installation – the eight separate screen-printed panels – were hung above eye level and angled out from the wall at the top. By this means they may seem to loom somewhat threateningly over, and dominate the spectator. [fig.37]

The project revealed limitations that caused me seriously to rethink some of my key assumptions. Attendance at the exhibition averaged 15 people per day over 10 days – approximately 150 visits in total. This constituted a level of visitation that the earlier art event, *The Enemy Below*, exceeded

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<sup>20</sup> This is a complex work, and the finer details of my mode of construction and of the materials deployed are to be found in Appendix 4

in one forty-five minute session. Whilst being satisfied with the artwork for the show, the failure of *Ecological Manipulations* to attract even reasonable audiences meant that, as a project intended to communicate ecological issues to a wide general public, the show was of limited success.

It became clear to me that, to meet the objectives of my project, the conventional gallery setting was inappropriate. For the same reasons, I moved away from printmaking and into visual art modes more appropriate to settings within the public domain. An additional strategy was my deployment of public communications media in order to inform a wider audience of the existence and rationale of my public art events and installations.



Figure 37

Jane Quon  
*It Will Never Be Fished Out* (1999)  
Mixed media print  
140 x 730 x 45cm (max d)

These changes also involved a rethinking of the collaborative relationship with industry. In the art/industry partnership that underwrote *Ecological Manipulations* I was 'encouraged' to use my art as a promotional vehicle for the Tasmanian aquaculture industry. The industry expectations were that the art should

avoid exposing the very problems in the fragile marine ecosystem to which my overall project sought to direct attention. My artistic intention was to express and expose, rather than cover up any unpalatable truths.

### Art Project 3

#### *Ecological Roulette*

*Ecological Roulette* (2000) was a multimedia public art event involving digital imaging, computer animation and sound. It was staged in partnership with Wrest Point Hotel-Casino [fig.39] in early February, 2000. The project was planned as a key event within the Ninth International Conference on Harmful Algal Blooms, held at Wrest Point from February 7-11, 2000, and attended by 400 delegates from 35 countries.



Figure 39

**Jane Quon**

*Ecological Roulette* (2000)  
Conference Centre  
Wrest Point Hotel-Casino  
Sandy Bay, Hobart

*Ecological Roulette* sought to artistically interpret the theme of the scientific conference, and was devised for wide public exposure as well as for presentation to the conference delegates. The conference theme – the ecological threat posed by introduced marine pests – precisely coincided with the ongoing focus of my art. A technical objective was to familiarise myself with the organisation, presentation and promotion of a large public event. In addition to its association with the scientific conference, *Ecological Roulette* coincided with the Hobart City

Council's Summer Festival, and was listed as part of the Festival program.<sup>21</sup>

The work took the form of a large-scale video projection onto the exterior walls of Wrest Point Hotel-Casino's Convention Centre. For the duration of the conference, the same film loop was also projected onto a large screen inside the building. The work comprised digitally-manipulated images derived from video footage and micro-photographs of various marine organisms: some beautiful, some dangerous, some both. It consisted of a seamless fusion of computer-manipulated images interconnected with pre-recorded as well as live video underwater imagery. I juxtaposed full-colour imagery, of (for example) jellyfish and the massively enlarged eye of a tiny seahorse, with similarly enlarged but black and white microscopically-imaged dinoflagellates. Projected onto two of Wrest Point's large white exterior walls, the work was visible in suburbs several kilometres distant. The visually-transformed building with its walls of moving images and light, seemed to take on the nature of an art image in its own right and became as much the focus of audience attention as did the actual images. I did not conceive of the exterior walls merely as neutral 'screens' but as elements in a multi-planar sculptural complex. A sense of overall fluidity was provided by lights which evoked a colour 'wash', and there was an absence of the familiar rectangular film-screen borders. I received assistance from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, which provided me with an outside broadcast truck and crew for two days, along with the equipment to achieve the lighting design required. Wrest Point Hotel-Casino cut their extensive carpark ambient lighting for the event and painted the larger of the two massive walls to maximise the intensity of the images.

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<sup>21</sup> *Ecological Roulette* was supported by a \$3,200 HCC Community Development Grant.

*Ecological Roulette* reflected my interest in anthropological perspectives on art. My view as to what counts as art is embodied in the ‘seven key functions’ of art defined by Dutch anthropologist A.A. Gerbrands:

... the religious and supernatural, the social prestige value, the play aspect, the aesthetic aspect, the linguistic or communicative function, the technological aspect, and the political function.<sup>22</sup>

Arnold Rubin has been particularly influential in this respect. He has characterised art as the ‘public rituals’ that generate ‘affective response’ within the community. Thus, the Pasadena Tournament of Roses, a traditional (now big-budget) street parade, constitutes in his view a ‘work of art’.<sup>23</sup> I hoped that *Ecological Roulette*, might have fulfilled a similar celebratory function.

The event’s social function was epitomised by the fact that, as well as being created for a large audience in a popular setting, it expressed important social issues. As with the work of Wodiczko and De Gruchy, my work employed the dynamics of large-scale transformation of the familiar, confrontation with the unexpected and the excitement of ‘an event’. Whilst the quality of the artwork itself was a paramount consideration, these other affective dynamics, inherent to the large-scale-public-projection format, were also extremely significant factors. As popular communication, the event demonstrated the potential of the art event as a strategy for realising my research objectives.

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Broughton, L.R.P. (1984), ‘What Might Count as Art In Schools’, unpublished M. Ed. Dissertation, University of Tasmania, Hobart (Tas.), p.109.

<sup>23</sup> Rubin, A. (1979), ‘Anthropology and the Study of Art in Contemporary Western Society: The Pasadena Tournament of Roses’, in J. Cordwell, [ed.], *The Visual Arts: Plastic and Graphic*, Moutin, The Hague.



Figure 40

Jane Quon

*Ecological Roulette* (2000)

Wrest Point Conference Centre

Sandy Bay, Hobart

Electron microscope images © Gustaaf Hallegraeff

The Lord Mayor of Hobart launched *Ecological Roulette* on the historic Derwent ferry, *Cartela*, which provided, for 220 scientists and members of the general public, unique vantage points from which to view the artwork on the Casino wall. Original video and photographic imagery for *Ecological Roulette* was provided by CSIRO, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Dr. Gustaaf Hallegraeff of the Plant Science Department of the University of Tasmania, Karen Gowlett-Holmes, marine biologist and underwater photographer, and Mick Baron, videographer and marine biologist of the Eaglehawk Dive Centre. Southern Cross television advertised the event free of charge over several days, the Hobart *Mercury* ran a feature piece (as well as advertisements) on the event<sup>24</sup>, Wrest Point advertised it in their events column in the same paper, I was interviewed on ABC radio, and the event was included in Summer Festival promotional material. Such wide media promotion of the event was important not only to maximise audience numbers; the promotion itself served as a highly effective vehicle for bringing marine ecology issues to the attention of a very large audience.

*Ecological Roulette* provided another opportunity to test one of my overarching strategic aims – that mutually beneficial relationships may be realised in partnerships between art and science, art and industry, art and corporate and government bodies, and between art and the wider community.

<sup>24</sup> Waterhouse, C. (2000), 'Secrets of the Deep Surface in a Spectacular', *Mercury, The*, (Hobart), 4 February.





Figure 41

Jane Quon

*Ecological Roulette* (2000)

Wrest Point Conference Centre

Sandy Bay, Hobart

● original video image ● Mick Baron

In terms of outcomes, the value of cross-discipline and cross-vocation collaborative relationships was reinforced.<sup>25</sup> This experience also impressed upon me the importance of addressing the issue of introduced marine pests on a more global level. I thus determined to take my work to an international stage, and attempt to reach the people whose decisions bear crucially upon future policies and practices in relation to the marine ecosystem.

<sup>25</sup> Dr. Hallegraef and the conference organisers, the ABC, and Wrest Point Hotel-Casino were all cooperative, considerate and extremely helpful partners. Dr. Meryl Williams of the World Fish Center, Penang, attended the conference, and the renewal of my acquaintance with her resulted in the sealing of a major international collaboration (one that is ongoing). I received an invitation to take *Ecological Roulette* to New Zealand, an invitation I was unfortunately not able to take up. But Rebecca Scott, who was to curate CSIRO's international *métis* exhibition in 2001, heard of *Ecological Roulette*, and contacted me with an invitation to stage a similar event in Canberra at the *métis-Wasted* exhibition. This subsequently transpired, and the project is described below (see Art Project 5). An article on *Ecological Roulette*, by Lindsay Broughton, appeared in the magazine *40° South*, and reached an audience of several thousand readers.

## Art Project 4

### *Ballast Exchange*

I was invited to participate as an artist within an interdisciplinary conference held in Launceston, entitled *Bass Strait Forum 2000*. It was in this context that *Ballast Exchange* (2000) was conceived. The conference sought the input of professionals, managers, the community, industry, academics, historians, policy makers and artists for a three-day symposium on the topic of Bass Strait. The aim of the conference was to initiate dialogue which would lead to improvements in marine environmental planning, assistance for land use planning in the region, exchange of ideas and information, and celebrations of the region's rich and unique cultural history. *Ballast Exchange* was an installation designed and purpose-built for relatively easy dismantling and re-erection. As with *The Enemy Below*, I was attracted to the possibility of deploying my art for communication and broad educational purposes. The intention of my installation was to address issues concerning the biodiversity, sustainability, and general ecological wellbeing of Bass Strait and its many islands.

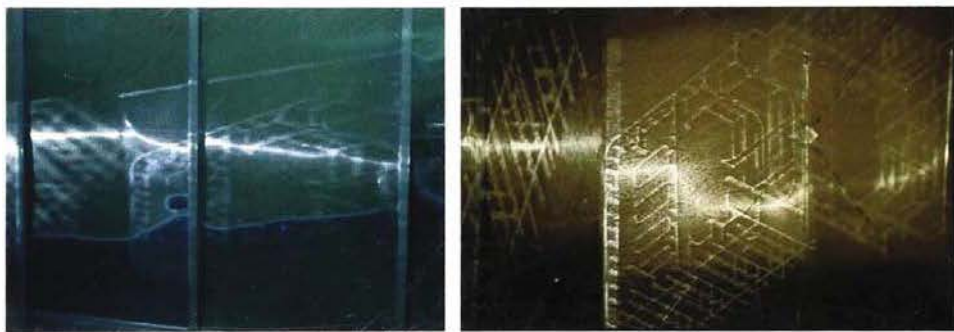


Figure 42

Jane Quon  
*Ballast Exchange* (2000)  
Mixedmedia installation, (details)  
242 x 484 x 242cm

*Bass Strait Forum 2000* was held in 'The Tramsheds', part of the former Inveresk Rail Yards, now transformed into a major Launceston cultural site, from 30 November to 2 December 2000. The event was instigated by a national non-government



organisation, the Marine and Coastal Communications Network (MCCN)<sup>26</sup> and was organised around three themes of significance to Bass Strait. Within the artwork I sought to link all three themes – cultural significance, scientific/natural values and planning/management. The cultural theme of indigenous interaction with Bass Strait has involved significant and difficult issues of cultural and racial continuity. Perhaps the initial cultural impact of European invasion coincided precisely with the beginning of the ecological impact of introduced marine pests upon our waters via the agency of shipping.

The installation was a mixed-media video and sound installation, the major element of which was a ‘shipping container’ made from polystyrene sheets sheathed within shiny aluminium sheeting. [fig.42] Eight stylised images of a ballast tank in cross-section were projected upon the external walls of the container. A sound loop incorporated ‘live’ watery sounds. Inside the ‘container’, two video projections ran on continual loops and were presented on four angled screens. In front of these screens was a tiled glass floor which reflected the images, thus creating an additional screen within the space.

A visual component which connected the two separate films within *Ballast Exchange* was an image of a turning lighthouse prism, layered and fused with images of cables, shackles, chains, underwater life (including images of introduced marine pests), diagrammatic ballast tank cross-sections and Japanese text. The ambient sound within the overall installation space – a large blacked-out hall – comprised an amalgam of recorded natural

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<sup>26</sup> I had already initiated discussions with Christian Bell, Manager of MCCN Tasmania, during the *Ninth Annual Conference on Harmful Algal Blooms* in February 2000 [see above], and with representatives from Queensland’s MCCN and an affiliated body from New Zealand during the Ballast Water Management Symposium held in Brisbane which I attended in 1999 [see above]. I thus knew what MCCN’s aims were, and they were very much in tune with my own, particularly the stress they placed on the need for an integrated approach to environmental management.

sounds which varied in pitch, timbre and volume and which was electronically synthesised to evoke a marine soundscape.

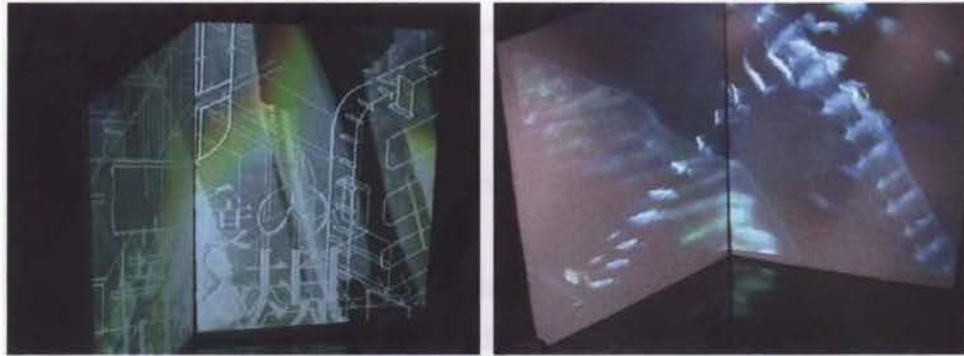


Figure 43

Jane Quon  
*Ballast Exchange* (2000)  
Mixedmedia installation,  
Multimedia sound and video projection (detail)  
242 x 484 x 242cm

Inside the container – and in contrast to these exterior sounds – Russian<sup>27</sup> and English voices, similarly manipulated, spoke the jargon of ballast dumping<sup>28</sup>. These created a more interactive listening environment. The words, sometimes barely discernible, created an antiphonous effect and were interspersed with sounds of shipping dubbed from raw video footage I had previously filmed in Greece and Turkey. In the latter country, I had recorded sound from a large cargo vessel which had been turned on its side, presumably capsized by heavy seas. The recorded sound of welling swells moving in and out of the stricken ship, combined with the metallic creaks and scrapings of the deteriorating vessel, became a major element within this (and subsequent) sound installations.<sup>29</sup>

The lighthouse is simultaneously a symbol of both safety and danger. It has become an archetypal warning sign, and has

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<sup>27</sup> The Russian voice was used because the Red Sea is probably the source of several introduced dinoflagellates (Hallegraeff, G. [2000], Pers. Comm., 14 August).

<sup>28</sup> An example of the phrases included are: invasion risk; hull fouling; global frequency; response strategy; inspection regime; catchment management; international management; international cooperation; risk assessment; survey protocols.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of the materials deployed in this installation see Appendix 5.

played a crucial role in the navigation of Tasmanian waters since earliest colonial days, nowhere more so than in the shipwreck-strewn region of Bass Strait. The lighthouse also serves as a metaphor for danger in a more general sense – in this case, the dangers posed by exotic marine pests introduced into Tasmanian waters when dumped in ship ballast water, or when transported from other parts of the world on the hulls of vessels.

The image of the lighthouse prism is presented as a series of overlapping manipulated layers. It is also enigmatic – the light flashes, and it flashes from a near distance. It was my intention that the meaning of the lighthouse imagery would remain ambiguous: whether or not it signified safety or danger would remain an open question. Lindsay Broughton has described the effect thus:

...we do not see the reassuring light of a safely distant, somewhat romanticised lighthouse... [It] is a dramatic close-up. We see nothing of a lighthouse building as such; it is as if we are blinded by its intense flashing light. And if we are located so close to the light, then we are, by inference, so close to the danger of which it warns that it may even be too late for us. The image's lack of specificity immediately confers upon it greater ambiguity...<sup>30</sup>

The lighthouse image was also used by W.C. Piguenit (1836-1914) in his romantic realist painting in water-colour and gouache, *The Tower of Strength* (c1900). [fig.44] In a catalogue essay, Hobart curator, Romy Wall, has described the metaphoric effect of the lighthouse in this painting:

...against the power and the majesty of the ocean The Tower of Strength (the lighthouse) is but a tiny speck on a barren headland dwarfed by the foam-crested, translucent green waves and the rugged, seaweed covered rocks onto which they break. The picture is a poet's delight but a navigator's nightmare. It brings to mind images of the dangerous seduction of the Sirens, whose sweet singing lured ships' crews to their doom of jagged rocks.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Broughton, L.R.P., (2001) 'Pelagic Space', Catalogue essay in *mêtis 2001:Wasted, Exhibitions of Science and Art*, National Science Week, May, Canprint, Canberra (ACT), pp 68-71.

<sup>31</sup> W.C.Piguenit found his inspiration in the power and beauty of nature. *The Tower of Strength* [c1900] is part of the collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. This excerpt is taken from the exhibition catalogue, Wall, R. (1997), *Sea: Maritime Treasures from the Collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery*. 28<sup>th</sup> Nov.



Figure 44

**WC Pigenit [1836-1914]**  
*The Tower of Strength* (c1900)  
 Watercolour and gouache  
 35.7cm x 56cm

Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart

I endeavoured to convey a similar impression to Pigenit's within my work, but I sought to do this by foregrounding the image of the lighthouse. The lighthouse, the shackle, the chain, are all suggestive of danger and all are man-made. Alerted to that lighthouse's warning, we exercise vigilance. In *Ballast Exchange* these images are juxtaposed against images from the natural marine world. They set up a tension between the sensual and the sinister, evoking the often catastrophic interface between ecosystem and humanity.

Just as the lighthouse has a symbolic function, so does the shipping container. It is intended to stand for the enormity of all that is transported by sea across the world. It is the vessels which carry these containers, constantly plying the oceans of the world, that are the major means by which exotic and dangerous pests are transported into Australian marine ecosystems.

I have been encouraged in the deployment of the shipping container within my artwork by considering the way in which photographer, Allan Sekula, has utilised the container as an image in his project, *Fish Story* (1996).

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1997-4<sup>th</sup> Jan 1998, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart (Tas.), picture 132 (np).



Figure 45

**Allan Sekula**

*Containers used to contain shifting sand dunes (1994)*

Veracruz

Photograph size unknown

Sekula conceives of the shipping container as a material symbol of the concept of 'globalisation'. 'Today', he writes, 'containers are the ubiquitous material symbol of Asia'.<sup>32</sup> *Fish Story* provides an allegorical insight into the decline of the maritime industry as a site of romantic seafaring. [fig.45]

Within the shipping industry, the container is seen as the crucial element in a functional ensemble, submitting all other machines to its rule. 'The container', Sekula writes, 'must be viewed as a vehicle of transportation and the ship itself only as an underlying carrier, or... merely as a form of locomotion for the container'.<sup>33</sup> I elected to use the container as the central image for *Ballast Exchange* as a metaphor for the purely commercial function of shipping, concerned as it is with the efficient transportation of merchandise. Such a function sharply contrasts, ontologically, with the rich network of life that inhabits that element – water – over which the container moves.

My conception of how the 'container' might appear as an image was influenced by the highly-transformative effects of

<sup>32</sup> Sekula, A. (1996), *Fish Story*, Richter Verlag, Düsseldorf, p 135. Sekula's deployment of the container as a vector of globalisation opens up interesting lines of thought on the question of agency within globalisation more generally. Reluctantly these matters are beyond the scope of the present investigation. Those who are interested should consult Wark (1994).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p136.

Wodizcko's projection upon buildings. With my multiple projections onto the 'container' in *Ballast Exchange*, I sought to 'de-materialise' the form of the structure, utilising the shiny aluminium surfaces as screens for my own overlapping projected images. I sought a somewhat ethereal, spectral image, yet one bounded by the still-familiar form of the ubiquitous container. Like Wodizcko, I wanted my image to persist in the mind of the viewer and for the image of the 'container' to take on an occluded existential dimension. Importantly, I wanted the viewer to retain the memory of my work's theme – the harmful practices of ballast dumping.

There were some deficiencies. To project within the 'container' itself was difficult as there was little room for equipment. (This could be resolved in the future by the use of mirrors to facilitate projection from above). Most equipment was hired for the art event. Some, brought in at the last moment during installation, was not identical to the equipment I had used in Hobart whilst devising the work, and this resulted in compatibility problems. The project proved to me yet again the imperative of building up one's own arsenal of equipment.

In respect of outcomes, the three-minute 'promo' developed from this project has since proved extremely effective as a device to communicate my project to potential collaborators within industry and science.<sup>34</sup>

## **Art Project 5**

### ***Pelagic Projections***

*Pelagic Projections* (2001) was a part of *mêtis-Wasted*, a set of separate simultaneous exhibitions staged in Canberra in May 2001 during National Science Week. The exhibitions explored synergies between art and science. Initiated and coordinated by

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<sup>34</sup> This documentary film of '*Ballast Exchange*' is included in the DVD that accompanies this exegesis as part of the documentation for my submission, and associated material is included in the hard copy folio.



CSIRO, separate components of *mêtis-Wasted* were presented in various galleries and other public venues throughout the National Capital. The event provided an opportunity to develop further the art/science links that had become central to my art praxis.<sup>35</sup>

My contribution to *mêtis-Wasted* was presented at the National Science and Technology Centre – Questacon – the site for which my work was, subsequently, specifically devised. A sound and video installation, *Pelagic Projections* provided an excellent opportunity to develop some of the methods employed in both *Ecological Roulette* and *Ballast Exchange*. The work involved separate large-scale video projections, one onto the façade, the other in the foyer of the Questacon building. The interior component consisted of a three-screen sound and video installation, while a large-scale video-with-sound projection was created for the outside of the building. The external projection consisted of the films from *Ballast Exchange*.

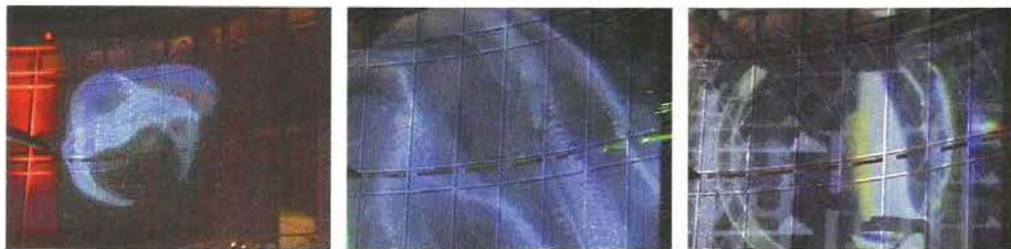


Figure 46

**JaneQuon**

*Pelagic Projection* (2001)

Still images from exterior projection

National Science and Technology Centre

● Questacon, Canberra

● original video stills © Mick Baron

<sup>35</sup> This project provided an opportunity to extend what I had already learned about the staging of an art event at Wrest Point Hotel-Casino with *Ecological Roulette*. I travelled to Canberra twice in connection with *mêtis-Wasted*. The first occasion was to discuss with Questacon personnel and the curator (CSIRO's Rebecca Scott), Questacon as an exhibition site, and to explore potential specific locations within it. Though I had been invited to present an event at the launch of the exhibition, I needed to conclude negotiations and confirm my involvement. I showed the *Ballast Exchange* promo and the video documentary of *The Enemy Below* (see DVD documentation). The *mêtis* exhibitions create a synergy between artistic expression and science, merging the boundaries between the disciplines and highlighting the benefits of collaboration between the arts and the sciences.

In the foyer the three films were projected onto separate viewing areas, and could be seen from many vantage points.

The *mêtis* exhibitions curator, Rebecca Scott, was committed to bringing together international artists known for their operating at the cusp of science.<sup>36</sup> My own contribution to the exhibition was developed over the course of a year. In addition to creating the work itself, I was involved in visits to Canberra, negotiating aspects related to presenting the work in the venue, equipment availability and hire and many additional logistical considerations<sup>37</sup>.



Figure 47

Jane Quon  
*Pelagic Projection* (2001)  
Still image from exterior projection  
National Science and Technology Centre  
Queanbeyan, Canberra

My initial plan was to make screens which would be suspended across the interior diameter of the central architectural core of the building at various levels. Images projected onto a scrim could be viewed from above and below, where both my exhibition and the *mêtis-Wasted* launch were planned to take place. It was my intention to create within this environment a

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<sup>36</sup> The many environmentally-focussed artists exhibited at *mêtis-Wasted 2001* included Robert Gschwantner.

<sup>37</sup> Though such considerations do not constitute 'artistic' work as such, they are nonetheless time-consuming (and expensive) necessities to be attended to if one is to present work in non-gallery settings within the public domain. Indeed, they are the factors which ultimately determine a work's very existence, at least in its intended form.



space reminiscent of the deep diving experience discussed in Chapter 1.



Figure 48

National Science and Technology Centre  
Questacon, Canberra

A combination of options was discussed and considered for exterior projection, and appropriate site photographs were taken. Personnel changes within Questacon's organisation, however, led to changes in programming. This necessitated a reconceptualisation of the Questacon building in terms of projection possibilities. The video artworks specifically made to suit the interior of the drum were subsequently projected instead within the foyer of the building.

The video projections onto the building's exterior comprised the films presented during *Ballast Exchange*. [fig.49] These were originally intended for projection onto the exterior surface of the round central core of the building – or 'drum' – the highest point of the building and a feature that may be seen from distant vantage points across Canberra. [fig.47-48] Though I conducted test projections onto the Drum, my original intentions were logistically constrained: all my technical requirements were not obtained due to personnel changes in the organisation. Last minute changes needed to be made, and I projected instead onto the curved glass façade of the building's main entrance.



Figure 49

**Jane Quon**

*Pelagic Projections* (2001)

Exterior Projection,

Film stills from *Ballast Exchange* (2000)

National Science and Technology Centre

Questacon, Canberra

Original video stills © Mick Baron

The work presented within the Questacon foyer was created as a multiple projection piece. I experimented with three screens, each of which would be created individually and be able to function independently, but so designed as to work in relation to the others. Images produced would intersect and become interconnected, but could still be viewed as a seamless whole. The creative aspects I wished to develop arose in my previous video projection from the chance interplay created through the juxtaposition of images. Within the films made for *Pelagic Projections* a highly stylised jellyfish form moved from the right screen to the left. This became the device used to connect the individual screens. Images folded back, separating to reveal an added dimension of size to the central screen or, alternatively, they rolled in from the edges, producing imagery which was



Figure 50

**Jane Quon**

*Pelagic Projections* (2001)

Still image from 'Three in One' documentation

National Science and Technology Centre

Questacon, Canberra

inextricably linked, finally forming a single image which stretched the width of the three screens. At times the screens were devoid of any imagery.

I refilmed *Ballast Exchange* and used this as a textural background for the three screens.<sup>38</sup> Other images were sourced from marine life and from maritime industries. These included shackles and ropes from ships and images of decay, rust, detritus. I intended to further extend the use of sound in this work. I added various European and Asian voices to the Russian voice which formed a component of the *Ballast Exchange* films, in order to evoke the global nature of the ballast water dumping problem. It was also my intention to make reference to current practices within the shipping industry in Tasmania, at the same time linking to a global domain. A key element in *Pelagic Projections* was the diagrammatic linear imagery of 'spinning boats'.<sup>39</sup> [fig.51] These forms turned slowly upon themselves at first, but the original two eventually became five, the whole interwoven with sound building frenetically as the boats turned more quickly. Within this sequence, it was my intention to evoke a sense of a churning, driving mechanism; giant pistons throbbing, driving on relentlessly until the cacophany became so

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<sup>38</sup> The equipment used in this project is detailed in Appendix 6.

I should note, here, however, that the bane of this project was again my reliance (a long way from home) on strange equipment and on the expertise of others in its use. Again, the need for an installation artist to have confidence – which means the control that equipment ownership confers – over his/her tools and technologies was confirmed for me. In a personal communication, prominent Australian projection artist Ian De Gruchy has stressed this need, and I now know him to have been right (2001, Pers. Comm.). The difficulties of the Qwestacon space/s, along with the logistical/technological difficulties, constitute the negative outcomes of *Pelagic Projections*. I know that an installation artist working with non-art collaborators and unpredictable equipment must be flexible, and must always have fallback strategies. In retrospect, I am pleased with the way I responded to the last minute crises in this project. Difficulties notwithstanding, I felt that the external projection worked well. And, given that the internal films were designed to be presented seamlessly, yet were not projected in the way that I would have desired, and given that the foyer was an extremely difficult space in which to present, I felt that the internal projection worked as well as I could have expected.

oppressive as to be almost intolerable. The relentless and impersonal nature of the imagery was also intended to evoke dispassionate human intrusion into the marine ecosystem: a remorselessness and an absence of sensitivity.

The oppressive visual and aural experience of the 'spinning boats' cuts to the similarly frenetic screen-wide imagery of the highly magnified underbelly of the voraciously-feeding invasive North Pacific starfish. Again, I have sought to convey the sense of a relentless, machine-like intruder – albeit, in this instance, a biological one – wreaking destruction upon the undersea environment. To heighten the sense of oppression the creature is shown in huge full-screen close-up, and its feeding motion is accelerated to evoke an impression of frenzy. The film then cuts abruptly to the single centre screen and the eye of a sea-horse. This is an 'all-seeing' eye; it is innocent, poignant, benign, with the status of a silent witness. It is a metaphor for the marine ecosystem *in toto*, perhaps standing as testament to its own destruction. But the image is accompanied by the sound of a single drawn-out blast that, in the context of shipping, signifies an intention to move right and forward. It is thus possible to see the film as concluding optimistically, a potential reading reinforced by the images of the tiny microscopic creatures that flourish within a healthy marine environment that recur as filmic microcosms within the larger film.

A five minute film which documents my presentation of *Pelagic Projections* has been made, along with additional documentation demonstrating how the seamlessly integrated multiple-screen films were intended to be experienced within the Questacon foyer (see DVD documentation 'Three in One'). The project also proved the value of my networking strategies: *Pelagic Projections* led to my being asked by CSIRO's Marine Division

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<sup>39</sup> A component of the film was wire-frame engineering images of two cargo ships that ply between Tasmania and overseas – the *Bell Bay* and *Mobil Australis*.



to be part of a (subsequently successful) grant application for a 2002 National Science week art/science collaboration in Hobart (see Art Project 7).

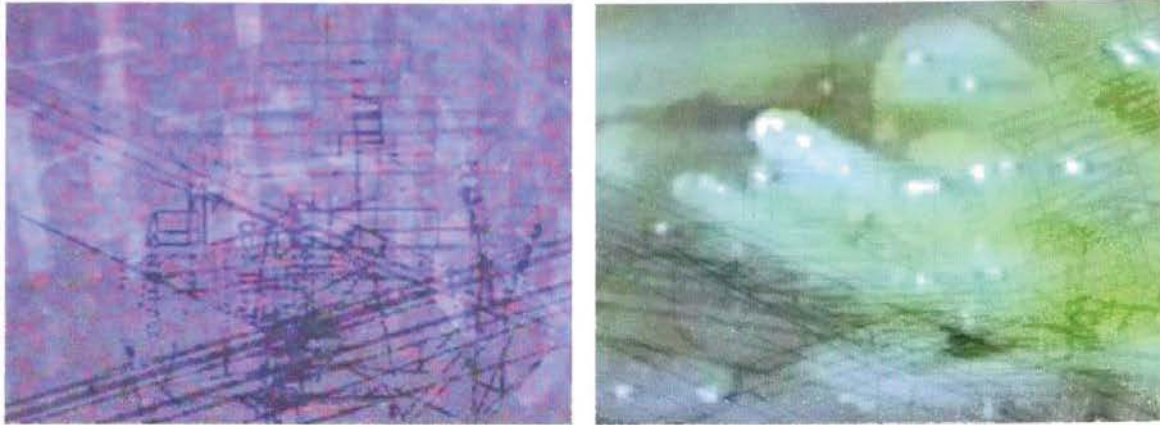


Figure 51

**Jane Quon**

*Pelagic Projections* (2001)

Still images from central screen video

National Science and Technology Centre

Questacon, Canberra

Prior to the making of *Pelagic Projections* I resolved to experiment with elements such as the still images of Japanese text, as used in the *Ballast Exchange* film, and to develop the written word as a moving image. The opportunity for this did not arise until the making of *Marine Incursion*.

## **Art Project 6**

### ***Marine Incursion***

In June 2000 I attended the Marine Environment Protection Council's (MEPC) annual meeting in London. Here I met the senior personnel of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and began negotiations for presenting artwork at 'MEPC 47' in 2002. The ballast water problem is an international issue; thus dealing with the problem requires international action. Such action occurs principally through the activities of the IMO and MEPC.

One of the key strategies that the IMO seeks to develop is public education, both formal and non-formal, which it deems critical in providing the community with the capacity to address issues of environmental concern. Public education is also crucial for the development of community values, skills, behavioural habits and environmental awareness conducive to sustainable development. It is in this context that I successfully argued a case for the inclusion of an art presentation and installation at the IMO's 2002 Conference, something that had never happened before within the organisation.

*Marine Incursion* (2002) is the result. A video installation that focuses upon the current dire condition of the world's seas, *Marine Incursion* was made for a single screen with stereo sound, for viewing within a typical theatrette.

The targeted audience for *Marine Incursion* consisted of the key personnel involved in making global policy in respect of ballast water dumping. It would be impossible to reach an audience more senior in the decision-making chain. I wished to bridge the gap between my art and this high-powered but idiosyncratic audience by incorporating elements with which they would be familiar: visual references to shipping, for example, and modalities such as text and human voice. Text and voice presented a challenge: how to use text without giving the impression of credits, or subtitles, and how to use voice in a way that was integral to, and seamless within the artwork rather than its suggesting an externally-imposed commentary.

The work involved collaboration with other artists, notably a poet and an actor. (This is still a work in progress and it is anticipated that artists in other media will be involved in later stages.) Although the overall artistic vision of the project remained my own, the collaborators were full contributors and not simply hired hands. A poem was especially devised for this project, entitled 'The Old Mind and the Sea' (see Appendix 7).

It was written by Peter Hay, in his guise as a widely published Tasmanian poet in whose work ecological themes are overt. His writings on ecological thought have been influential in the construction of my own ideas.

Before he commenced the poem I talked to Dr. Hay about my underwater experiences, about the role and function of MEPC and the IMO, and about the ecology of oceans generally. An admirer of Rachel Carson's classic writings on the ecology of oceans<sup>40</sup>, Hay's poem evokes the ocean as a living entity. The poem contains a clear antiphony, a call and response that is a metaphoric shadow of the ebb and flow of the tide. One of the allusions that ebbs and flows through his poem is the irresistible, primal tug of the ocean on the human mind, an evocation of the 'movement of the mind' dynamic that my project as a whole seeks to effect.

In the video, prominent Tasmanian actor/director John Hale provided the voice. His collaboration, like Hay's, formed an integral part of the work's development. In his interpretation of the poem, Hale responded to its back and forth rhythm. I wanted the voice, as distinct from the actual words spoken by the voice, to suggest a disembodied atavistic conscience. A recurring visual image is that of a human figure seemingly trapped and struggling within a net. I conceived this as a metaphor for the ocean itself, striving to free itself of the constraining bonds that human activities impose upon it.

A mooring rope is another component of the visual structure of the video. As well as the rope serving as a familiarising device for the specialist maritime audience, it may be seen to signify connecting of land and water, the water's surface and the world below the water, and human intrusion into the marine domain.

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<sup>40</sup> Carson, R. (1951), *The Sea Around Us*, Panther, London; Carson, R. (1968), *The Sea*, MacGibbon and Kee, London.

However, the intended metaphoric function of the rope goes beyond this. I conceived the rope, in fact, as a device which stood for the connection of the visceral to the cognitive, and of sensation to thought. It serves, I hope, as a device that leads the immediate, pre-rational artistic impulse to a conscious analysis of issues of marine ecology. I hoped that *Marine Incursion* would serve to link artist and environmental decision-maker.



Figure 52

**Jane Quon**  
*Marine Incursion* (2002)  
Movie still  
Duration 9min.

I consider that two positive outcomes emerged from this project. The first was that a successful art presentation was able to be made at a prestigious international conference of high-level marine environment decision-makers. The second was that the project enabled me to discuss with scientists, industrialists and



Figure 53

**Jane Quon**  
*Marine Incursion* (2002)  
Movie still  
Duration 9min.



policy makers my intention to utilise art as a medium to communicate broad environmental and social issues.

The video of *Marine Incursion* has since been presented within a public forum on art and environment in Hobart in May, 2002 and also at the Environment, Culture and Community Conference in Brisbane in July 2002.

As a strategy, this work has the advantage of portability that more complex installations, even when demountable, do not possess. It could also be adapted to conventional television programming.

## **Art Project 7**

### ***We Engage With Invisible Tides***

*We Engage with Invisible Tides...*(2002) was a semi-permanent sculptural installation partially-to-fully submerged (depending on the tide) in Waterman's Dock, Hobart. The sculpture was assembled during *Science in Salamanca*, a science/arts festival held during National Science Week 2002. Collaborating partners were CSIRO and Hobart Ports, with in-kind support provided by the University of Tasmania.<sup>41</sup> The project brought together several of Hobart's major cultural, scientific and marine-environmental policy stakeholders.

Waterman's Dock is located within Sullivan's Cove – Hobart's port and the city's major tourist and pedestrian precinct. As such, the site provided the most strategic location for my installation.

Furthermore, at no other site within the Cove is the passer-by in more intimate proximity to the water. Thus the sculpture was viewed by a great many people – including school and university

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<sup>41</sup> A National Science Week grant of \$3000 covered the cost of materials, with Q-Ecology providing matching support. Pasminco supplemented the grant with \$700 for the sculpture's computer-generated design and for catalogue printing costs.

students specifically brought to view the work – over the three-week duration of its installation. The work's physical setting – in water – carried symbolic significance, water constituting such an intrinsically ecological<sup>42</sup> element. In the water, my work shared aquatic space with the introduced North Pacific Seastar (*Asterias amurensis*), and with a small school of fingerlings which made of my installation a temporary home.

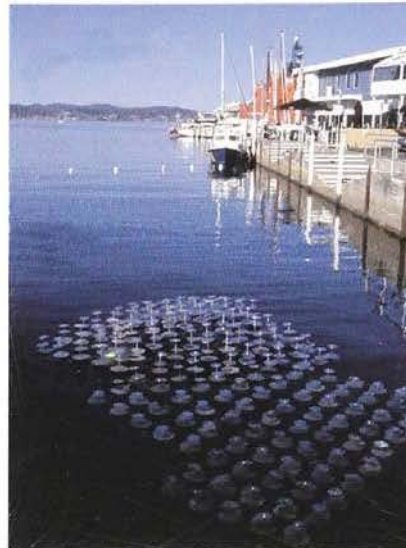


Figure 54

**JaneQuon**

*We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002)

Mixed-media Marine Installation

Waterman's Dock, Hobart.

(h) variable (28 x 120cm) 420 x 450cm

The sculpture consisted of a steel-framed grid in three sections offset from each other and sunk within Waterman's Dock about 1.5 metres below the mid-tide surface. One hundred and fifty untreated steel boiler rods were vertically attached to the three grid-frames, with laser-cut aluminium discs of varying diameters – and totalling 500 in number – fixed at different distances from the tops of the rods, with the largest discs at the lowest level. The overall form of the sculpture – a flowing wave effect – was

<sup>42</sup> In assessing this piece, I derive satisfaction from the sense that I have returned whence I started – to the issue of introduced marine pests on my own doorstep. It gives me added satisfaction because I consider this to be a truly 'ecological' piece, both in terms of its meeting my own 'ecological' criteria, and its interaction with the natural elements of the particular marine ecosystem.

created by cutting vertical rods at different lengths. [fig.55] The constant variations which played upon the sculpture – of tidal level, light, wind, rain and current – constantly changed the nature of the viewing experience.



Figure 55

**Jane Quon**

*We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002)

Mixed-media Marine Installation

Waterman's Dock, Hobart

(h) variable (28 x 120cm) 420 x 450cm

Light and the ebb and flow of the tide were key considerations in the conceptualisation of the installation. Elements of the metal fabrication reflected and refracted light, both natural and artificial, the latter by means of a light installed underwater, as well as, at night, by the abundant ambient lighting provided within the precinct. The fabric of the installation was treated in order to produce different ambient lighting effects, whilst tidal flows also altered the visual impact. My intent was to convey a sense of perceptual fluidity between the sculpture and its ever-changing environment – in effect, to present a 'different' sculpture at different times of the day and from different viewpoints around the dock apron. I sought to create an underwater installation that met my own ecological criteria for public art (as described in earlier chapters) and which conveyed a sense of the living complexity of the estuarine ecology<sup>43</sup>. The project sought to foster an awareness of the Derwent estuary's

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<sup>43</sup> An artwork such as this leaves itself open to any manner of 'idiosyncratic' or 'accidental' readings, and though a matter that I would like to investigate in the future, there is no capacity to explore this issue here.

ecologically-crucial microfauna. Yet the work itself was non-didactic in terms of content, and non-representational in form.

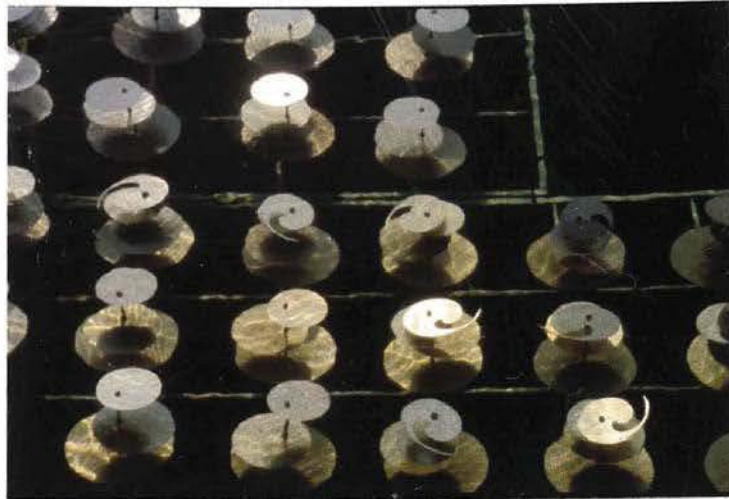


Figure 56

**JaneQuon**

*We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002)

Mixed-media Marine Installation

Waterman's Dock, Hobart

(h) variable (28 x 120cm) 420 x 450cm

The rods were flexible enough to move with the current, while the changes in lighting on the water's surface provided myriad formal variations on the piece as a whole. At high tide the installation was entirely submerged; at low tide most discs were above the surface. The installation also assumed a different dimension at night, when the 400w submerged light took greater effect, and accentuated the green algal bloom that was present in the dock at the time.<sup>44</sup> The lights were designed to emit minimal heat.

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<sup>44</sup> The installation was created in a computer design program, Cinema 4D (Mathew Weame Design). In addition to CSIRO and Hobart Ports, I consulted with an architect, a public art consultant and a metal fabricator (Bevan Rees, Yvonne Rees-Pagh and Bow-Tie Engineering respectively). The grid was constructed off-site in three sections to enable easy transportation. It was spray-painted in a metallic colour, though differentially graded to suggest the coruscations of fish flanks. The rods were measured to different lengths, and attached to the grid with small nuts and washers, as were the discs to the rods. The rods and discs were cut, and the installation assembled, off-site. Preliminary tests were carried out on-site before the final design was determined. Matters of design, even matters of fine detail, had to be established with precision in advance. The weight, size of the discs, the nature of the seabed, the dimensions to be given to the fabricator – even tidal



My concept was for the elements within the work to convey different allusions to the living nature of the estuary, and of human interaction with it. In his catalogue essay, Dr. Peter Hay writes:

The artist's deployment of a gridded substructure suggests rigidity, certainty... the geometry that expresses the imprisonment of nature/space is the grid, and it is brutal in its contempt for natural patterns, for biophysical intricacy, for the flexibility that attends an other-regarding humility.<sup>45</sup>

And of the rods and discs he writes:

Unruly elements. Symbols of resistance, they signify the movement, the intangibility, the elusiveness of nature – and the elusiveness of our knowing of it... we are reminded that our triumph over nature is uneasy – hollow and temporary.<sup>46</sup>



Figure 57

**Jane Quon**

*We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002)

Mixed-media Marine Installation

Waterman's Dock, Hobart

(h) variable (28 x 120cm) 420 x 450cm

A work such as this, exposed within a powerfully modifying, unpredictable natural environment, encourages a somewhat humble conception of the artist's role. My installation, for example, acquired a patina of algae, and its metal components began visibly to deteriorate. Unplanned 'aesthetic qualities' appeared and disappeared, in the same way that Andy Goldsworthy's photographs reveal such qualities – or 'moments' – in the lives of his transient environmental installations.

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patterns – all had to be known in advance. There was no scope for trial and error at the point of installing the work.

<sup>45</sup> Hay, P. (2002), 'We Engage With Invisible Tides...', catalogue essay in *Art: Eco-Ecology*, self-published, Hobart, np.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

I felt that *We Engage With Invisible Tides...* possessed an 'ecological' fluidity, a poetic element that was not achieved in my earlier projects. In a philosophical sense, I considered my relationship to the work to have embodied ecological principles, akin to a collaboration with nature itself. Further, the nature and placement of this work served to subordinate the status of myself as artist, elevating the work instead. Paradoxically, I found this relative anonymity liberating, appropriate to the ecological intent of my project.

### **The Submission**

My final submission consists of various art projects. Some are presented in their more-or-less fully realised form. These are *It Will Never Be Fished Out* (1999), *Ballast Exchange* (2000), *Pelagic Projections* (2001), *Marine Incursion* (2002) and *We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002). Other works are presented in the form of documentation. The *Ballast Exchange* film is submitted as a separate item. The three films which comprise *Pelagic Projections* are documented as one. In the case of the art projects, *The Enemy Below* (1999) and *Ecological Roulette* (2000) respectively, slide and film documentation is provided on DVD, along with additional film and slide documentation of *Pelagic Projections*. The individual screen and digital prints included in my exhibition, *Ecological Manipulations*, are included as components of the research documentation. With the exception of *We Engage With Invisible Tides...*, it has not been possible to present the artworks in the physical and social contexts for which they were originally devised, and, given that 'site' has constituted an important factor in influencing the nature of many of the artworks, their presentation in the context of my submission is less than optimal. I am, however, satisfied with the Dechaineux Theatre and the two venues made available

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by Hobart Ports<sup>47</sup>, but it has not been possible to present the print, *It Will Never be Fished Out*, in such a way that the back-lighting could not be seen. Collectively, however, these works provide a comprehensive representation of the various modes of visual communication employed during the research, and the range of collaborations, venues and audiences that I have sought to involve.

In producing documentation of my research I have attempted to convey the ways in which the research has unfolded. In addition, I have aimed to provide, through DVD, a general understanding of the nature of the art projects that have comprised my research. In some cases, such as the events in Canberra and London, where personnel were not available to document my presentations, this has been difficult.

The Conclusion that follows provides a summary of the central concerns of this research and its contribution to the field.

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<sup>47</sup> Two venues, Waterman's Dock and Princes Wharf No. 2 Shed, have been made available by Hobart Ports for my submission, a testament to the extent of their collaborative commitment to the projects.



## Conclusion

In my introduction I advanced seven propositions that would be tested in this research. Several of these focused upon the communicative function of art: its capacity to influence values, promote awareness and inspire action leading to social change. I argued that art is a unique way of knowing, a visual language with a potential for conceptualising and representing social issues generally, and ecological issues specifically. I advanced a view of art that asserted its historical function in respect of cultural formation and its potential to serve as a vehicle for social change.

During my research I have completed several projects which have involved various artistic modes, strategies and contexts for the presentation of my works. Each project has opened up new possibilities for the next, not only in terms of artistic development, but also in the way that each has brought to light new human contacts and possible new sites for subsequent works. In each project, my own subjective visceral responses to the natural world has been transposed into the objective cognitive organisation of a work of art. It has been my aim that each piece might evoke affective responses in viewers which could, in turn, contribute to a widespread paradigm shift in public attitudes toward the marine environment. Immediate public responses to my various artworks have been highly encouraging in this respect.

My fourth proposition states that 'partnerships and collaborations between artists working in different modes, and between artists and scientists, decision-makers and scholars from other disciplines, can provide the synergies which will most effectively deliver the change potential of art'. My research has emphatically demonstrated the validity of this proposition. I have discussed the complexities that may arise in the collaborative process, but I

have also argued that, even when problems occur, the artistic outcome can still transcend shortcomings. When the collaboration is successful in every respect, the artistic output not only gives great satisfaction, but the collaboration itself constitutes a positive outcome, evoking as it does the very spirit of an ecological art praxis.

In terms of the concept of ecological art which I advance, the natural world itself becomes a significant shaping factor. It becomes, in effect, a virtual collaborator in the artistic process. The sense of affinity between art and nature achieved in my final piece (*We Engage With Invisible Tides...*) also confirms the importance of presenting my works in non-gallery public venues.

Another proposition advanced is that the new art media 'have particular potential in regard to the communicative potential of art... because such artistic modes have a greater capacity to speak meaningfully to a wider public'. In reference to this proposition, I have experimented with various visual modes, seeking to ascertain their relative communicative potential. I consider my final piece, the sculptural installation, *We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002), to have been the most successful in this respect. The interaction of this work with its marine environment is direct and immediate; commensurately, my own witnessing has revealed that the work serves to direct viewers' attention quite substantially to the water within which it is sited. The environment itself, in fact, becomes an inherent aesthetic element. The perceived success of this sculptural installation has not depended upon 'new (ie, electronic) media'. Nevertheless, other works which have involved new media – in multi-screen and large-scale projections on buildings and other large outdoor settings – have also been highly effective as communication vehicles. Such works have demonstrated for me the potential of

video as a medium with considerable social reach and affective impact.

The links which I have established with industry have been numerous and central to the research. The most significant such link is my ongoing collaborative project with the World Fish Center, in Penang, Malaysia, a partnership which involves the production of numerous artworks based upon marine ecology themes. Research for some of these works will take me to the Mekong Delta in Vietnam, where I will be working alongside World Fish Center scientists in education programs aimed at the realisation of sustainable food programs in the lower Mekong fishery.

This research has investigated the potential of art effectively to highlight various issues pertaining to the marine environment, the most prominent being the environmental impact of ballast dumping. During the research I have utilised various strategies and artistic modes to this end. Despite logistical difficulties in some cases, the various projects and the responses to them have realised the research objectives of effectively communicating marine-ecological issues through the agency of art. I intend further to explore the potential of new-media art projections, marine installations and the art event using cross-disciplinary collaborative models.

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**Chapter 1**  
**Background Influences**

*Figure 1*  
**Anish Kapoor**  
*Adam*, (1998-89)  
Sandstone and pigment  
119x102x236cm  
Collection Tate Gallery, London

**Chapter 2**  
**Art, Values, and Social Change**

*Figure 2*  
**Leonardo da Vinci**  
*Cartoon for the Virgin and Child with St. Anne* (c1500)  
Charcoal on paper  
137x107cm  
National Gallery, London

*Figure 3*  
**Karel Appel**  
*Woman with Head* (1964)  
185 x 225cm  
oil on canvas

*Figure 4*  
**John Glover**  
*Mills Plains* (c1832-34)  
Oil on canvas  
72.26 x 151.9cm  
collection: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart

*Figure 5*  
**Peter Dombrovskis**  
*Morning Mist, Rock Island Bend* (1983)  
24 x 19cm  
photograph on 5x4 ektrachrome E6 film

*Figure 6*  
**Joseph Beuys**  
*7,000 Oaks* (1982)  
Photograph taken of the first planted oak  
on the Friedrichsplatz in Kassel,  
documenta 7, 1982 by Ute Klophaus



*Figure 7*

**Krzysztof Wodiczko**

Onto Hirshhorn Museum,

Washington DC

Projection

<http://www.art-for-change.com/Krzysztof/Krzyz.htm>

*Figure 8*

**Shirin Neshat**

*Speechless*, (1996)

B/W RC print and ink

Photographer: Barry Larns

*Figure 9*

**Shirin Neshat**

Stills from *Rapture* (1999)

16mm film transferred to DVD,

shown on 2 facing screens,

13 minute loop

*Figure 10*

**Jenny Holzer**

From *Arno* (1967-97)

185mm Kodaklit-film Xenon projection

Dimensions variable

Project, Arno river, 'Biennale de Firenze: il tempo e la Moda',

Florence, 1996

### Chapter 3

#### Ecological Principles for Art Practice

*Figure 11*

**Peter Dombrovskis**

*Lower Franklin Below Jane River* (1983)

21 x 17cm

*Figure 12*

**Nicole Newley**

*Example of Living* (2001)

Oil on canvas

100 x 68cm

## Chapter 4

### Art and Ecology

#### Figure 13

**J.M.W. Turner**

*Snow Storm – Steam Boat off a Harbour's Mouth making Signals in Shallow Water, and going by the Lead. The Author was in this Storm on the night the Ariel left Harwich* (1842)

Oil on canvas

91.4x121.9cm

Tate Gallery, London

#### Figure 14

**Frederic Edwin Church** (1826-1900)

*Twilight in the Wilderness* (1860)

Oil on canvas

101.6cm x 162.6cm

The Cleveland Museum of Art

#### Figure 15

**Joseph Beuys**

*Coyote: I like America and America Likes Me.* (1974)

Action at the Galerie René Block,

New York, 21-25 May 1974

Photography Lorraine Senna

#### Figure 16

**Christo and Jeanne-Claude**

*Wrapped Coast* (1969)

Erosion-control fabric, rope

93 sq. km

Little Bay, Australia

#### Figure 17

**Robert Smithson**

*Spiral Jetty* (1970)

Rocks, earth, salt crystals, water

6,783 tonnes earth. 1.450m; ø450

Great Salt Lake, Utah

#### Figure 18

**Michael Heizer**

*Double Negative* (1969-70)

244,800 tonne displacement

Rhyolite, sandstone

457 x 15 x 9 m

Mormon Mesa, Overton, Nevada

#### Figure 19

**Richard Long**

*Clearing a Path* (1998)

A Six Day Walk in the Hoggar, Sahara

*Figure 20*  
**Andy Goldsworthy**  
One of The Fifteen Drove Stones  
*Sheep Folds Project* (1996) Detail  
Dry Stone  
Casterton, Cumbria

*Figure 21*  
**Andy Goldsworthy**  
*IcePiece* 7-8/10-11 January (1987)  
Cibachrome photograph  
76 x 76cm  
Scaur Water, Penpont,  
Dumfriesshire, Scotland.

*Figure 22*  
**Jill Peck**  
*Undercurrent* (1999)  
Etched sandstone, marine stainless steel  
12 x 6 m  
Dorian Photographics

*Figure 23*  
**Aniko Meszaros, Sean Hanna, Donald Cowan**  
*Territories of Interwoven Genetic Design* (1999)  
Governor of Osaka Prefecture Prize.  
Osaka, Japan

*Figure 24*  
**Robert Gschwantner**  
*Erika* (2000)  
PVC tubing, motor oil  
Size unknown  
Photograph by Paolo Cipolina

## **Chapter 5**

### **My Project and its Component Artworks**

*Figure 25*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Ballast Trade 11* detail (1999)  
'Ballast Water Where To From Here' Conference  
Brisbane, March 1999.  
80 x 60cm

*Figure 26*  
**Jane Quon**  
*The Enemy Below: The Black Striped Mussel*  
*Invasion of Darwin* (1999)  
Performance, video, computer and sound  
Still image from video documentation

*Figure 27*

**Jane Quon**

*The Enemy Below: The Black Striped Mussel  
Invasion of Darwin* (1999)

Performance, video, computer and sound  
Still image from video documentation

*Figure 28*

**Jane Quon**

*The Enemy Below: The Black Striped Mussel  
Invasion of Darwin* (1999)

Performance, video, computer and sound  
Still image from video documentation

*Figure 29*

**Jane Quon**

*Fish School* (1999)

Inkjet on canvas  
123 x 172cm  
© Mick Baron

*Figure 30*

**Jane Quon**

*Jelly Tendril* (1999)

Inkjet on canvas  
123 x 172cm  
© Mick Baron

*Figure 31*

**Jane Quon**

*Comb Jelly* (1999)

Inkjet on canvas  
123 x 172cm  
© Mick Baron

*Figure 32*

**Jane Quon**

*Cloisonné Jelly* (1999)

Inkjet on canvas  
60 x 110cm  
© Mick Baron

*Figure 33*

**Jane Quon**

*Hand Fish* (1999)

47 x 65cm  
© Mick Baron

*Figure 34*

**Jane Quon**

*Sea of Tranquility – Moon Jelly* (1999)

Screenprint on paper  
47 x 65cm  
© Mick Baron

*Figure 35*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Rex Pyne: Total Eradication* (1999)  
Screenprint on paper (detail)  
65 x 47cm

*Figure 36*  
**Jane Quon**  
*It Will Never Be Fished Out* (1999)  
Mixed media print installation  
730cm (w) x 140cm (h) x 45cm (max. d)

*Figure 37*  
**Jane Quon**  
*It Will Never Be Fished Out* (1999) detail  
Mixed media print installation  
730cm (w) x 140cm (h) x 45cm (max. d)

*Figure 38*  
**Jane Quon**  
*It Will Never Be Fished Out* (1999) detail  
Mixed media print installation  
730cm (w) x 140cm (h) x 45cm (max. d)

*Figure 39*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Ecological Roulette* (2000)  
Wrest Point Conference Centre  
Sandy Bay, Hobart

*Figure 40*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Ecological Roulette* (2000)  
Wrest Point Conference Centre  
Sandy Bay, Hobart

*Figure 41*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Ecological Roulette* (2000)  
Wrest Point Conference Centre  
Sandy Bay, Hobart

*Figure 42*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Ballast Exchange* (2000)  
Mixed media installation,  
242cm (h) x 484cm (l) x 242cm (w)  
photograph: L. Broughton

*Figure 43*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Ballast Exchange* (2000)  
Mixed media installation,  
242cm (h) x 484cm (l) x 242cm (w)  
Multimedia sound and video projection (detail)

*Figure 44*  
**WC Piquenit** [1836-1914]  
*The Tower of Strength* (c1900)  
Watercolour and gouache  
35.7cm x 56cm  
Collection: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery

*Figure 45*  
**Allan Sekula**  
*Containers used to contain shifting sand dunes* (1994)  
Veracruz  
Photograph size unknown

*Figure 46*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Pelagic Projections* (2001)  
National Science and Technology Centre  
Questacon  
Still image from exterior projection

*Figure 47*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Pelagic Projections* (2001)  
National Science and Technology Centre, Questacon  
Still image from exterior projection onto the 'drum'

*Figure 48*  
National Science and Technology Centre  
Questacon  
Photograph: Lindsay Broughton

*Figure 49*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Pelagic Projections* (2001)  
Still image from Exterior Projection,  
Film from *Ballast Exchange* (2000)  
National Science and Technology Centre  
Questacon

*Figure 50*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Pelagic Projections* (2001)  
Still image from 'Three in One' documentation  
National Science and Technology Centre  
Questacon

*Figure 51*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Pelagic Projections* (2001)  
Still image from central screen video  
National Science and Technology Centre  
Questacon

*Figure 52*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Marine Incursion* (2002)  
Movie still  
Duration 9min.

*Figure 53*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Marine Incursion* (2002)  
Movie still  
Duration 9min.

*Figure 54*  
**Jane Quon**  
*We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002)  
Mixed-media Marine Installation  
Waterman's Dock, Hobart.  
420cm x 450cm x (h) variable (28cmx120cm)

*Figure 55*  
**Jane Quon**  
*We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002)  
Mixed-media Marine Installation  
Waterman's Dock, Hobart.  
420cm x 450cm x (h) variable (28cmx120cm)

*Figure 56*  
**Jane Quon**  
*We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002)  
Mixed-media Marine Installation  
Waterman's Dock, Hobart.  
420cm x 450cm x (h) variable (28cmx120cm)

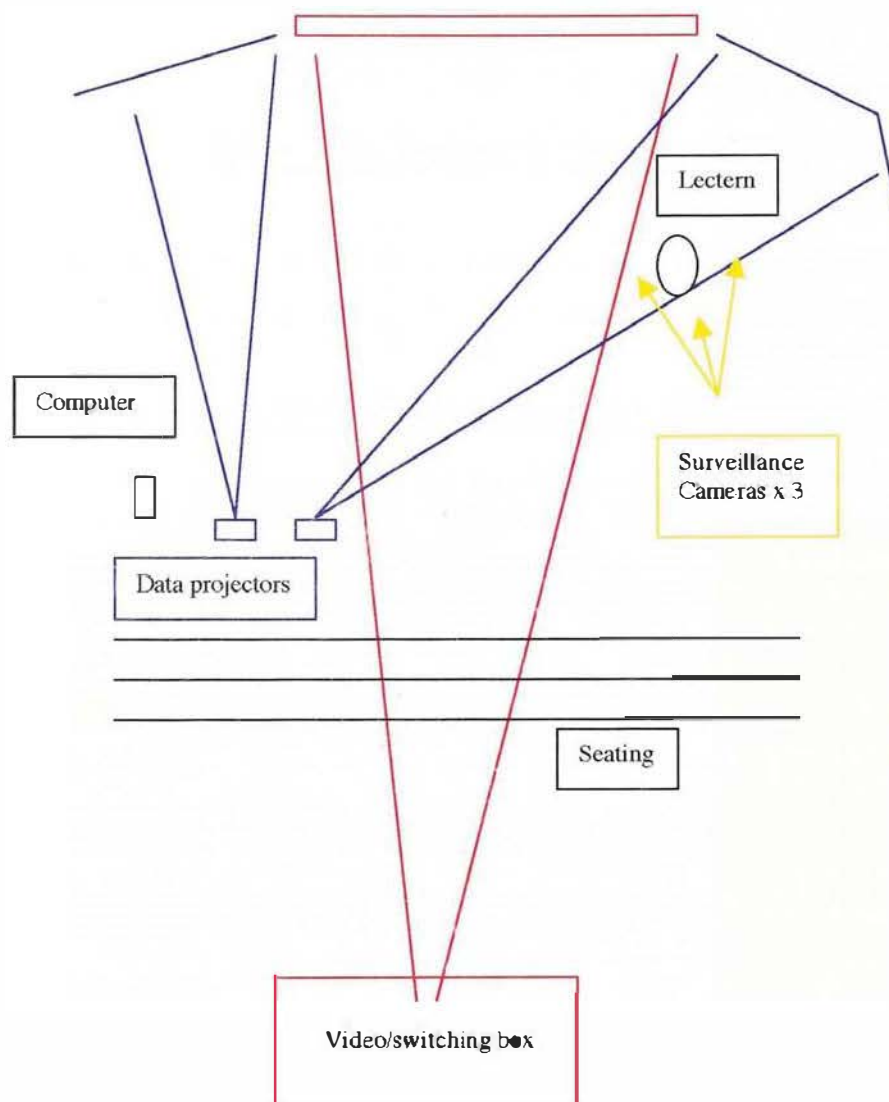
*Figure 57*  
**Jane Quon**  
*We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002)  
Mixed-media Marine Installation  
Waterman's Dock, Hobart.  
420cm x 450cm x (h) variable (28cmx120cm)

**APPENDIX 2:**  
**Materials used in**  
***The Enemy Below* (1999)**  
**and Scenario for Projection**

The following equipment was used: a G3 computer, with an additional computer card to project the image without the working screen; two data projectors; two projector screens; one overhead light; three black and white surveillance cameras; a video camera; a video camera tripod; one switch box; RCA cabling; and one video recorder. Several lots of pre-recorded sound were used.

The scenano for projection is presented diagrammatically below.

DECHANEUX THEATRE, CENTRE FOR THE ARTS.





### APPENDIX3:

#### Script for Artist's Talk *The Enemy Below* (1999)

What has the Black Striped Mussel invasion of Darwin got to do with Art? What role did artists play in this drama? What role could artists have played?

Let's step back and consider the broader question.

What is the role of the artist in society? Art is as old as humanity itself. Art is a fact of human life. Art takes diverse forms across diverse cultures.

Historically, in virtually all cultures, artists have served to reinforce, celebrate, educate and give pleasure to their communities: as John Dewey put it, art serves 'to consummate collective experience'.

The title of the book from which this quote is taken is *Art as Experience*. Dewey's proposition is that art is intimately bound up with the experience of the community as a whole - art should both reflect common experience and, at the same time, provide its host community with a special artistic experience – aesthetic experience.

Dewey's models for examining the role of art in society were 'traditional societies'. Such societies were considerably smaller and more homogeneous in terms of values, ethnicity, religion and quality of life than are the large, complex western societies of today.

Experience within modern society is incredibly diverse: so is the artistic vision and expression which reflects it. In common with their traditional forebears, however, contemporary western artists also hold a mirror up to society. But what they see is not harmony of values, ethnicity, religion etc. The experiences of western artists are not those they would wish to 'consummate' at all – they don't see what Mathew Arnold had dreamed that social experience might become: "all sweetness and light".

Confronted with the realities of the modern world the contemporary artist is more likely to be a critic than a celebrant of society.

We may not like it, but when contemporary artists throw back in our collective face those social contradictions which they perceive, they are only doing what artists have always done: representing their experience. In the words of Karrel Appel, "I paint like a barbarian - in a barbaric age".

Perhaps it is the critical stance of contemporary artists which has served to remove them from the centre of social life to the periphery – think of the public outrage at Serrano's *Piss Christ*. The artist is seen as an outsider, often as eccentric, or comical, and is even resented. Of course, many artists also see themselves as outsiders, and consider this, as I do, to be a morally valid stance.

Ironically, the forms of contemporary art often have tended to sterilise their content. The public is outraged by the art, rather than by any social deficiency the art may have exposed. It is a case of shooting the messenger and deflecting the urgency of the message.

As for me, I don't want my art to outrage people.  
I don't want it to alienate them.  
I want my art to seduce them.

Seduce? Well, I want my art to provide aesthetic satisfaction to its audiences. And aesthetic satisfaction is a kind of seduction. The word 'aesthetic' is from the Greek 'aesthetikos' meaning, in broad terms, 'heightened sensory experience'; 'experience above the ordinary'. Anthropologists call it 'affective response'. (We also use the word 'feeling' in relation to works of art. Hence 'anaesthetic' - the absence of feeling).

I believe that when a work of art generates aesthetic response in its audience it has established a fundamental condition for the effective communication of its message. Have not the photographs of our own Peter Dombrovskis achieved enormous public sympathy for wilderness because of their aesthetic power? These photographs did not have to be overtly didactic – they didn't have to ram the message down our throats to be effective – they simply had to be beautiful – and we got the message.

Broadly speaking the message my art seeks to convey is the critical need to preserve the marine ecosystem. Hence I describe myself as an ecological artist.

Ours is an ecosystem under intense and increasing pressure. We regularly hear of toxic algal blooms, of oil spills, of marine pests entering our waterways in ship ballast-water and on ship's hulls. The Black Striped Mussel and the North Pacific Seastar are cases in point – and now, astonishingly, we see the legal introduction of diseased Canadian salmon.

Preservation of the ecosystem is to me of paramount concern, but I am also deeply concerned, as a citizen, about the broad social issues and economic consequences of such events. Thus, I see my role very much as one with the other entities with major stakes in the issue of the quality of our waterways: with aquaculture, fisheries and tourist industries, for example; with science, and with relevant corporate, governmental and statutory bodies.

Much of my work is 'public art'; that is, it appears in other than regular art venues such as galleries. Such 'public art' actually takes the form of 'art events' of various kinds. This presentation tonight is one such event. Other quite different events are planned.

I've stated my belief in the power of the aesthetic dimension to lay the necessary foundation for the effective communication of meaning in art. As an adjunct to this, I believe very strongly in the aesthetic potential of new so-called multimedia art forms - digital computer imaging, video and the internet etc. These new forms have the capacity to communicate

powerfully with an audience and to reach huge new art audiences. Indeed, multimedia art has the potential to break down the walls of the 'sacrosanct' art gallery by presenting art at the cutting edge of contemporary practice in wider public settings.

Due to their highly technical nature, and the logistical challenges associated with their presentation, multimedia events inevitably require several artists working in collaboration, as a team. Exciting artistic results can flow from collaboration – consider what can happen when a jazz band improvises, or when an ensemble cast really gels during a theatrical performance on a particular night. In such cases, the artistic outcome is more than simply the sum of the parts. A new heightened level of artistic experience for all the collaborating artists is attained.

Within this collaborative mode, my role is akin to that of a theatrical director, or to the conductor in an orchestra. I imagine the whole, I produce 'script', and I direct the events – and I take responsibility for any disasters.

**APPENDIX 4:**  
**Materials and Equipment Used in**  
***It Will Never Be Fished Out (1999)***

A suite of eight panels, each 122cm x 210cm and located 30cm apart is used. Each panel consists of an image screen printed onto stainless steel mounted on medium-density fibreboard. At the top of each panel is a 30cm diameter circular hole. Within each hole is placed an image inkjet printed on 'back-lit' paper, sandwiched between perspex and back-lit by a halogen light.

Each of the panels weighs 7.5kg and sits on a 4mm thick perspex shelf (right angle profile) which projects 60mm from the wall. This shelf is mounted at a height of 135cm-150cm from the floor.

Each panel is suspended at an angle of approximately 20° and at a distance of 45cm at the top from the wall by 0.6mm flexible steel wire cables. The cables are attached in turn to the back of the panels converging into a single (5cm x 5cm x 0.6cm) steel plate (right angle profile) screwed into the wall. There is one wall mounted 5cm x 5cm x 0.6cm steel plate for each of the eight panels. Each wall-mounted plate is located 120cm-140cm above the perspex shelf.

Extending the full length of the suite and behind the panels, and extending an additional 20cm at each end (ie making a total of 730cm in length), runs a trapeze, consisting of two parallel 0.6mm flexible electrical cables 10cm apart.

Attached to the trapeze by crocodile clips are eight halogen globes (without reflectors), one globe behind the perspex circle (the hole) in each panel. By this means the digitally printed image sandwiched between two perspex panel at the back of the hole in each panel is back-lit. At the extreme right hand end of the trapeze is a transformer for power conversion to 12 volts. Thus for powering 8 halogen globes a single power source close to or concealed in the ceiling at the right hand end of the suite is required.

**APPENDIX5:**  
**Materials Used in**  
***Ballast Exchange* (2000)**  
**and Scenario for Projection**

The installation was developed as a response to the industrial nature of the site, the size of the room (14 metres x 8 metres x 5 metres high ceiling) and the fact that it was a room with no natural lighting.

The 'container' which was the core element of the installation, measuring 2.42m x 4.80m x 2.42m was constructed using 50mm industrial polystyrene foam sheathed in .6mm aluminium sheeting. Each unit measured 2.42m x 1.80m and was fitted within a channel top and bottom making the structure completely demountable and designed to fit on the flat tray of a utility truck. The end walls were constructed from two structural units, braced using steel wire and tensioned using turnbuckles. The end walls were erected and slipped into a corner profile before the side walls made from 4 units (back) and 3 units (front) completed the container's structure. Steel wire and marine boating shackles were used as tensioning for the side wall construction. During Bass Strait Forum 2000, the interior was painted in a non-reflective black paint, while the paint used for the floor (3mm medium-density fibreboard) was highly reflective. The 'high gloss' floor was used in combination with laminated green tinted glass tiles. The small tiles, 40cm x 33cm, created a grid pattern.

Two 50mm polystyrene foam screens were painted black and two white. This was a compromise solution to accommodate the imbalance in the strength of the anisilumens in the data projection. The placement of the screens and the reflective quality of the floor created a multi-dimensional viewing area within quite a small and restricted situation. Limited as it was by the confined space, by the placement of the screens and the interplay of the reflection on the floor, the serendipitous effect created by the two separate video screenings became central to the concept in subsequent work.

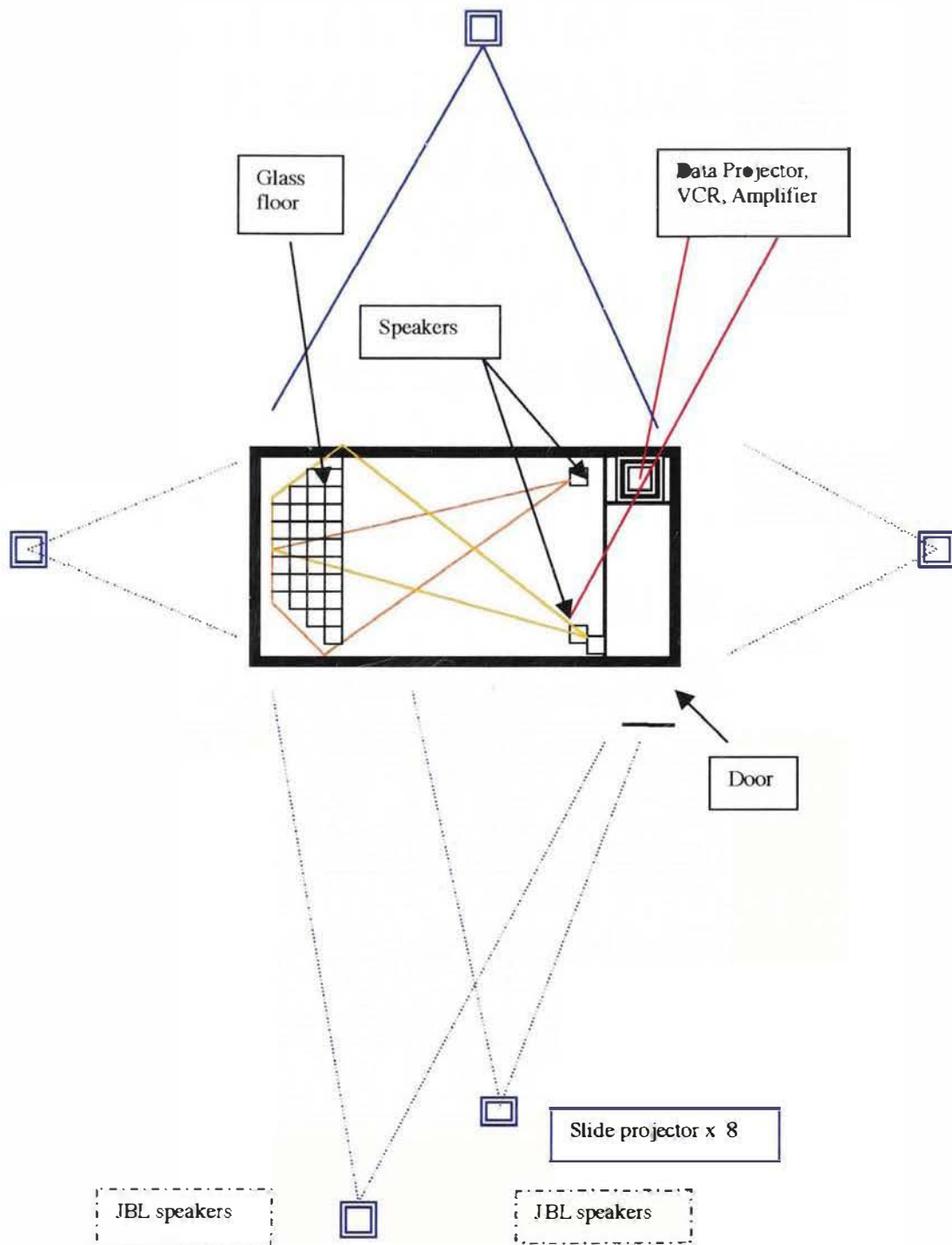
Still images from eight slide projections altered the architectural dimensions and emphasised the spatial ambiguity of the 'container'. The six still slide projectors also created ambient lighting within the

space. The projected images were scanned at a high resolution and were reformatted for projection.

Equipment included 2 x Data projectors; 2 x VCRs; 2 x JBL speakers; a 12 channel 'Mackie' mixer; 2 x interior speakers; an amplifier and 2 x mini CD players.

The scenario for projection is presented diagrammatically below.

INVERESK TRAMSHED, LAUNCESTON



**APPENDIX6:**  
**Equipment Used in**  
***Pelagic Projections (2001)***

The amount of equipment needed for *Pelagic Projections* was quite extensive, and is presented below in list form.

Data:

- Sony FE-100 SXGA 3,000 ANSI Lumen projector (outside)
- Eiki Powerhouse 2200 ANSI Lumen (inside)
- Sony 1700 ANSI Lumen and Sony 1100 ANSI Lumen (both inside)
- G4 Mac Computers, with DVD capacity (x3)

Audio:

- Electrovoice SX300 speakers (pair) (x3)
- SX200 speaker stand (pair) (x3)
- Dynachord 10ch mixer/amplifier

Lighting:

- ETC 19 degree profile (x4)
- ETC S4 par (x10)
- Studio colour wash light m-version (x4)
- 2.4k x 12ch dimmer rack (x12)
- Echelon 1k lighting console
- DD8 DMX splitter

Rigging Equipment:

- Chain block (x2)
- CLS 3m x 300mm tri truss (x4)

Power:

- 25mm 3 phase extension



## APPENDIX 7:

**'The Old Mind and the Sea'**  
**Poem written by P. Hay for**  
***Marine Incursion (2002)***

### I

The earth's high child tugs molten tides about.  
Tidal fire, surging.

Comes cloud, boiling thick, viscous.  
Comes rain. Rain. Rain. The torn scar brims.

Granules of landsalt grit down to a coolant sea.  
*And darkness was upon the face of the deep.*

It is a miracle chemistry, and it holds.  
The earth's high child tugs saline tides about.

Life streams. Diatoms. Protozoa.  
Cells coalesce. Life streams.

Tentacled weed anchors the shallows.  
Slugs with fins walk out on everdead rock.

Life streams. Cells coalesce.  
Fins into legs. The terrible teeth of lizards.

Sea to land. Again to sea.  
Cells coalesce. Life streams.  
Landward.  
Seaward.

Tidal life.  
A streaming tide of life from, through, to, from mother-sea.

Gentling, cruel, nurturant, indifferent.  
Mother-sea.

### II

The sea is the primary mind's spirit level -  
It holds the surging physics trim.

The sea is the knowing mind's spirit level,  
and the planet's.

The sea is the mind's spirit leveller.

### III

We are aeons bound on trailing chains.  
They gather us in with plankton, albatross, whale...

We bled from the sea.  
On the sheer keel of science we flow back.

We flow back, armed and curious.  
We engage with invisible tides.

We reap what we do not sow.  
Impossibly vast, it eludes us.

We are alien. Poor things of air.  
Alien this fecund swirl. Fish out of water.

We offer the tainted fruit of our enterprise.  
We swing the species around.

We simplify.  
We make turbid what was clear.  
Much is gone.  
Much is going.  
But we swing the species about.  
Simplify things.  
Thus are they known.

#### **IV**

The mind wants boundaries.  
It sees a mantle without shape, a-stir  
with a great probe of life,  
life surfacing, flexing, burgeoning fit to burst.  
The mind wraps it the planet round,  
one vast molecular swarm,  
swollen, uncontained with life's first spring.  
It is without bounds, says the mind,  
and the mind demands beginnings,  
ends.

But here the sea-heat dwindles,  
and light, there, is lost  
to the dark in the sea canyon's heart,  
and currents shape the difference here,  
and there nutrients pool and cluster.  
Life changes, fractures, seeks an elemental niche –  
and sea-space takes a bounded form.

#### **V**

Do I go too far? Ask what should not be asked?

I would know your beginnings,  
mother-of-life, spirit leveller,  
giver of all and taker of all.

And your ends.

Do I forget myself?

**Pete Hay**

## APPENDIX 8:

### *E. Curriculum Vitae*

**Jane Quon B.F.A. (Hons.), T.D.A. Tasmania.,**

1971 Teachers Diploma of Art -Tasmanian School of Art  
1973 Tasmanian Teachers Certificate - Education Dept., Tasmania  
1997 Bachelor of Fine Art University of Tasmania  
1998 Bachelor of Fine Art (Hons. 1) University of Tasmania  
1999-02 PhD Research, (Tas. School of Art, University of Tasmania)

#### **Grants**

- CSIRO Grant and Commission CSIRO, Hobart 2002
- Hobart City Council Community Grant x 2
- Aquaculture Industry/University of Tasmania Grant 1999
- University of Tasmania Arts Faculty Scholarship 1999

#### **Commissions**

- Architectural Artworks the International Center for Living Aquatic Marine Resources Management, Penang, Malaysia, 2000. Ongoing.
- Temporary Public Installation for CSIRO's Marine Division, Hobart. August 2002. Completed.
- Video Installation Design for an exhibition of historical ecology in collaboration with David Peters, ecological cartographer, Department of Primary Industries, Water and the Environment, Tasmania, and Spanking Sound Productions. Ongoing.
- *Future Perfect*, a collaboration of artists and writers on the theme of 'exploring Tasmania's tomorrow'. For March 2003.

#### **Selected Solo Art Exhibitions**

*We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002)  
Waterman's Dock, Hobart.

*Marine Incursion* (2002)  
International Maritime Organisation, London.

*Pelagic Projections* (2001)  
National Science and Technology Centre, Canberra.

*Ballast Exchange* (2000)  
Inveresk Railyards, Launceston.

*Ecological Roulette* (2000)  
Wrest Point Hotel-Casino, Hobart.

*The Enemy Below: The Black Striped Mussel Invasion of Darwin* (1999)  
University of Tasmania Centre for the Arts, Hobart.

*Optimum Water Quality* (1999)  
Australian Ports and Marine Authority, Brisbane.

*Ballast Water* (1998)  
Canberra.

Ballast Blooms (1998)  
CSIRO, Marine Division, Hobart.

#### **Selected Group Exhibitions**

*Ecological Manipulations* (1999). Carnegie Gallery, Hobart.

*A Flourishing Ecology* (1998) Long Gallery, Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart.

#### **Commentaries**

- Broughton, L. (1999), The Ecological Art of Jane Quon. In *40° South: Tasmania and Beyond*. Issue 15, Summer, 2000. pp 8-10.
- Hay, P. (2001), Dinoflagellates and Art: Jane Quon's Marine Installations. In *Artlink: Taking in Water*. Vol.21(1), 2001. pp19-21.
- Broughton, L. (2001), Pelagic Space. In *mêtis-Wasted*, Exhibition Catalogue Essay.
- Hallegraeff, G. (2002), Untitled Exhibition Catalogue Essay, *We Engage With Invisible Tides...*
- Hay, P. (2002), We Engage With Invisible Tides...Exhibition Catalogue Essay, *We Engage With Invisible Tides...*
- Taylor, P. (2002), Marine Installation. Exhibition Catalogue Essay, *We Engage With Invisible Tides...*

**Art As Ecological Communication: An Application of  
Site-Specific Installation Art to Marine Ecosystem  
Degradation**

by

Jane Quon BFA (Hons), TDA (Hobart)

Submitted in the fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

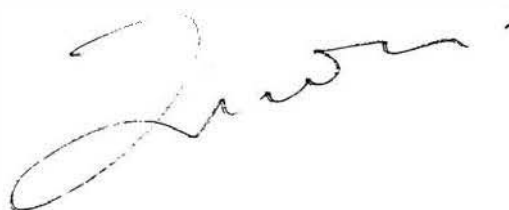
University of Tasmania  
Hobart  
November, 2002

## DECLARATION

### Signed statement of originality

This Thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University or any other institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, it incorporates no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

Jane Quon

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jane Quon', with a large loop at the start and a horizontal line extending to the right.

## AUTHORITY OF ACCESS

Signed statement of authority of access to copying

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Jane Quon

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jane Quon', with a large, sweeping initial 'J'.

## ABSTRACT

This research explores the potential of fine art to communicate ideas and values pertaining to ecological issues, in particular the marine ecosystem. The research is founded upon the historical function of art as a social, educative and, at times, activist cultural force. It investigates the potential of a variety of art modalities to fulfil this historical function. The different modalities comprise sculptural installation, large-scale video-based installation and printmaking. In addition to their diversity in terms of media, the majority of the works produced have been site-specific in character. Though presented in settings of vastly differing kinds, the common denominator of each site is that it provides exposure of the work to a broad public audience. Since the notion of art-as-communication is central to the research, the presentation of works in non-gallery, highly-frequented public contexts is an important objective.

The major influences on the author's ideas and art practice are described in the exegesis. Some influences are of a personal nature, and are advanced within the paradigm of phenomenology, within which experience and subjectivity is privileged. They include childhood experiences, pivotal encounters with works of art (notably with Anish Kapoor's 1988-89 work, *Adam*) and powerful underwater experiences. Other influences include ecophilosophy and environmental thought in general, with the fields of 'deep' ecology, ecological spirituality and the ecologically-grounded art theories of Suzi Gablik prominent.

The research is underpinned by reference to artists for whom an artistic praxis of social change is central. A number of 'public' artists who have utilised art as a socio-political instrument are addressed, including Joseph Beuys, Shirin Neshat, Krzysztof Wodiczko and Jenny Holzer. The ideas of philosopher John Dewey are also considered, particularly his position on the arts' role as a central force within culture: on what Ernst Fischer has described as 'the necessity of art'.

The research presents a concept of 'ecological' art which can be differentiated from 'environmental' art conventionally so-called, the



latter represented by Michael Heizer, Robert Smithson and Christo. Exemplars of the 'ecological' art proposed include Beuys, Andy Goldsworthy, Jill Peck, and Robert Gschwantner.

Each art project has arisen out of partnerships and collaborations forged by the researcher's establishment of strong links with key local, national and international organisations and specific personnel from within the realms of marine science, private industry, local government and the maritime industry.

It is posited that this research has contributed not only to broader public awareness of marine-ecological issues, but also to an enhanced appreciation of the significance of contemporary art – and of the contemporary artist – within the community.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people whose selfless support in connection with this project must be acknowledged. Many have appreciated the wider ecological context in which I wished to place my art and their support and encouragement has been sustaining.

To Joan Quon, and Gregory, Sophie and Nina Ricketts for the freedom of mind, body and spirit which enabled me to pursue this artistic endeavour.

I am indebted to Lindsay Broughton, Senior Lecturer in Drawing, art theorist, art educator and mentor who, over the duration of this research, provided stimulating and insightful conversations about art and life. I want to express my profound appreciation for his admirable patience and support in all matters.

To Dr. Llewellyn Negrin and Leigh Hobba, for their advice throughout my candidature, and Milan Milojevic for similarly supporting my work during its early phases. A great many collaborators and partners within industry, science and other artistic modes have given generously of their time, talent and vision. They include, most notably, Martyn Carpenter, Mick Baron, Karen Gowlett-Holmes, Avril Brown, Col Dyke, Andrew Dobbie, Kirsty Fellowes, Gustaaf Hallegraeff, Michael Julian, Jody Kingston, Rex Pyne, Sean Bacon, Matt Wearne, Brian Remer, John Hale, Yvonne Rees-Pagh, Bevan Rees, Pru Bonham, Peter Baker, Rebecca Scott, and Liz Turner.

I want to express my gratitude to Peter Hay PhD., Reader in Environmental Studies, Research Academic, essayist and poet, who has provided invaluable contributions to my research. His encouragement for me to expand the boundaries of art research and to collaborate with environmental research, has been inspirational.

Also, to Lindsay Broughton and Peter Hay at the University of Tasmania and Meryl Williams, Director General of the World Fish Center, for their support in establishing ways by which this research may be projected into the future.

Thanks to the Science, Engineering and Technology Faculty for my position as an Honorary Research Associate in the School of Geography and Environmental Studies. This position will enable me to continue working in this field.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Central Argument and Dissertation Overview

#### Central Argument

The research undertaken during my candidature has been underpinned by my interest in the social function of art. More specifically it has sought to demonstrate the capacity of art and the artist to raise people's ecological consciousness. Within this broad ecological context, my particular concern is that of marine ecosystem degradation.

Fundamental to this research is the proposition that art is a form of communication: what, in Lucy Lippard's words, is 'a view of the arts as communicative exchange'.<sup>1</sup> The communicative modes in which ecological issues are framed usually take the form of mass media products and academic publications<sup>2</sup>. My interest is to explore the potential of art – a less conventional medium – to communicate as effectively on ecological issues, and on the subject of aquatic degradation specifically as do these other modes<sup>3</sup>.

A second proposition that forms part of my central argument is that art can highlight and provide insight into important social

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<sup>1</sup> Lippard, L. (1984), 'Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power', in B. Wallis [ed.], *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, p342.

<sup>2</sup> These include professional journals, pamphlets, brochures, videos, magazine and newspaper articles and radio and television exposure.

<sup>3</sup> I am not presuming that there is a universal agreement and understanding of communication within art practice. But I do hypothesise that art can effectively serve political ends without descending into propaganda. I will be arguing that communication can involve more than the input of factual data and it is here that the visual language of art becomes potentially useful. Affective response to a work of art – 'aesthetic experience', or sensory experience which is 'above' ordinary experience – establishes in an audience a fundamental condition for communication. This view of art as a language of communication is developed at length in Chapter 2.

issues, while a third proposition is that art has the capacity to influence broad social values. Mine is a praxis that anticipates social change in the wake of changes effected in the realm of individual values.

A fourth proposition essential to my argument is that partnerships and collaborations between artists working in different modes, and between artists and scientists, decision-makers and ecological thinkers, can provide the synergies that will most effectively deliver the change-potential of art. My research arises from the premise that a collaborative approach between science and art has the capacity to realise works of art which not only possess aesthetic merit, but which also provide persuasive interpretive models that can be used to promote more ecologically sound practices in respect of the marine ecosystem. Since the project's inception I have established partnerships with key interest-groups from industry, science, statutory bodies and the broad community. Partnerships have been forged not only within Tasmania but also nationally and internationally. Such partnerships have sought to develop the concept of an 'ecological art' as a means of communicating ecological themes within the public domain.

A fifth proposition central to my argument is that new electronic art media have particular potential in regard to the communicative role of art and the intersectoral collaboration described above. I believe that 'new media' or 'multimedia' art has a unique and potentially revolutionary capacity to bring art into the ambit of a wider public. Whilst my various works have been produced within a variety of media, a major aim of the research as a whole has been to investigate, in particular, the potential of multimedia and the exciting possibilities arising from large-scale projection, with its inherent capacity to reach large audiences. Taking a cue from Marshall McLuhan's dictum that

'the medium is the message'<sup>4</sup>, multimedia possesses an inherent capacity to transform the place of art in society. In the process, I believe, it has the potential also to influence attitudinal change in respect of social and environmental issues. The belief that art can realise the social and environmental goals described above is underpinned by a concomitant belief in the significance of the aesthetic dimension of human experience. In my research, I am particularly interested in the aesthetic factor as a fundamental condition for effecting artistic communication. In a democratic society, social change arises out of the adoption of new values and occurs not only through the input of objective knowledge but also by the internalisation of 'feelings'. The aesthetic response, or 'feeling', that a work of art engenders in an audience establishes a fundamental condition for the communication of its message. Aesthetic experience may be defined as 'experience above the ordinary' or 'heightened awareness'. Whilst its occurrence takes the form of subjective response, it has been argued that the object which has inspired aesthetic experience would in fact have derived from the perceiving subject's *objectively* acquired knowledge.<sup>5</sup> As such, aesthetic experience may be seen as the product both of the senses *and* the intellect. Robert Witkin encapsulates this seemingly paradoxical duality with his concept, 'the intelligence of feeling'.<sup>6</sup> Thus a sixth proposition within my central argument is that art is a unique way of knowing, and that, as such, it constitutes a special way of perceiving, conceptualising, organising and representing experience and phenomena.

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<sup>4</sup> McLuhan, M. (1964), *Understanding Media*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, New York.

<sup>5</sup> Best, D. (1980), 'Objectivity in Artistic Appreciation' in J. Condous, J. Howlett, J. Skull, [eds.], *Arts in Cultural Diversity*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Sydney, p13-17.

<sup>6</sup> Witkin, R. (1974), *The Intelligence of Feeling*, Heinemann Educational, London.

This also has implications for the processes involved in art-making and the role of the artist. From the perspective of my research, the artist would serve as a creative interlocutor within collaborative groupings. This is the seventh proposition that constitutes my central argument. In one sense it may be seen as a movement away from the socially isolated constructs of art practice and a return to a more socially integrated, even activist role that the artist has, historically, often played. Artists have challenged, celebrated, educated and given pleasure to their respective communities. I concur with John Dewey's lamenting of 'theories which isolate art and its appreciation by placing them in a realm of their own, disconnected from other modes of experiencing'<sup>7</sup>, and with the Marxist philosopher, Walter Benjamin, who also criticised the conception of art as a self-referential, specialised pursuit radically distinct from other human activities.<sup>8</sup>

I have come to identify with a form of art that may be termed 'ecological art', by which I mean a dimension of public art that seeks to contribute to the restoration and preservation of biophysical integrity. I distinguish my art from the more commonly designated 'environmental art' because I do not necessarily use 'the environment' itself as a site – or 'canvas' – for my art works. Coming from a specifically *ecological* perspective makes one critical of some of the more ecologically intrusive artworks that have been produced under the banner of environmental art. A concern for ecology signifies a way of viewing the world and an identification of particular world problems. As such, 'ecology' has provided a meaningful framework within which my research propositions have been applied.

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<sup>7</sup> Dewey, J. (1958), *Art As Experience*, Capricorn, New York, p10.

<sup>8</sup> Benjamin, W. (1977), *Understanding Brecht*. NLB, London, p86.



In 1997, I read *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology*, a major work of ecophilosophy by Warwick Fox. For Fox, an ecologically-inspired philosophy is a *lived* philosophy. Its essence is not to be found in abstraction but in the relationships found within life on earth. It is a view of ecological interconnection that grounds the receptive subject within an overarching conceptual framework of interconnectedness. I surmise that an ecological viewpoint is one which privileges the subjectivity of embodiment over disembodied rationality. The priority of the feeling that is the essence of subjectivity is presumed.

In adopting this view of subjectivity, Fox and other ecophilosophers place themselves within the phenomenological tradition. So do I, as I proceed from an innate feeling for ecological processes, an emotional standpoint that has variously been called an 'ecological conscience', an 'ecological impulse' or, my preferred designation, an 'ecological imperative'. In artistic terms, I will argue, this describes aesthetic experience.

In the following chapter I describe the major influences on my art ideas and practice. The discussion starts from the assumption that feelings and impulses of a subjective, non-rational nature are more significant in the experience of art than are relatively objectified processes which may be seen to rest on 'logical' foundations, such as perceiving the representation of appearances, or functional design. My approach – based upon the privileging of experience and subjectivity – is consistent with that of phenomenology. The phenomenological method underpins all that follows.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the twentieth century philosopher who, along with Martin Heidegger, has done most to establish the epistemological credentials of phenomenology, has written:

Phenomenology is the study of essences; and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences: the essence of perception, or the essence of consciousness, for example. But phenomenology is also a philosophy which puts essences back into existence, and does not expect to arrive at an understanding of man [*sic*] and the world from any starting point other than that of their 'facticity'. It is... a philosophy for which the world is 'already there' before reflection begins – as an inalienable presence; and all its efforts are concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world, and endowing that contact with a philosophical status...[it] offers an account of space, time and the world as we 'live' them. It tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of... the causal explanations which the scientist, historian or the sociologist may be able to provide.<sup>9</sup>

Phenomenology is the preferred epistemology of many scholars seeking to make sense of ecological problems.<sup>10</sup> This is not surprising, because phenomenology's stress upon the realness of the world and the possibility of direct mediation with it, privileges bodily sensation over cognition. As the phenomenologically-inspired ecophilosopher, David Abram, writes: 'Merleau-Ponty invites us to recognize, at the heart of even our most abstract cogitations, the sensuous and sentient life of the body itself'.<sup>11</sup> Abram argues that 'the event of perception unfolds as a reciprocal exchange between the living body and the animate world that surrounds it'.<sup>12</sup> Such a theory of perception is in keeping with 'the animistic or participatory mode of experience known to all native, place-based culture'<sup>13</sup>, and, therefore:

the coherence of human language is inseparable from the coherence of the surrounding ecology, from the expressive vitality of the more-than-human terrain. It is the animate earth

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<sup>9</sup> Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962), *Phenomenology of Perception*, C. Smith (trans.), Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, ppviii-ix.

<sup>10</sup> On this see Hay, P. (2002), *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought*, University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, Australia, pp142-145, 150-151.

<sup>11</sup> Abram, D. (1996), *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, Random House, New York, p45.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p73.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p137.

that speaks; human speech is but a part of that vaster discourse.<sup>14</sup>

It is a central premise of my research that art, too, is ‘but a part of that vaster discourse.’ John Robert Livingston, has argued the same on behalf of music, claiming, in fact, that music is the primary ‘ecological’ art.<sup>15</sup>

For some, phenomenology and science are irreconcilable epistemologies. I take the view, however, that they are equally authoritative – but simply different – ways of perceiving and understanding. In my opinion the fullest ‘truths’ are realised when different epistemological approaches are brought to bear upon the same problem. This forms an important theme in the exegesis. However, my concern has not been to establish the legitimacy of scientific or other cognition-based ecological explanations. They already possess substantial currency. My concern has rather been to establish the legitimacy of the language of the visual arts as an effective form of ecological communication.

### **Profile of the Dissertation**

In keeping with the nature of phenomenological investigation, I describe within the exegesis facets of my own personal experiences. These, I believe, have constituted important formative factors in the development of my own ecological consciousness and ultimately, my consequent artistic orientation. Chapter 1 describes some key factors within my childhood and my later experiences within the natural environment, especially below the surface of the ocean, experiences which have been crucial to the shaping of my

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p179.

artistic praxis. I also detail in this chapter influences of a non-subjective kind – of marine science and marine policy formation, for example – the personal significance of which derives directly from my subjective engagement with the marine environment.<sup>16</sup>

In Chapter 2, 'Art, Values and Social Change', I consider the work and practice of theorists and artists who, from their various perspectives, have proclaimed art to be essentially 'public' or 'social' in its function. In this I conceive art in what John Dewey<sup>17</sup> regarded as its critical role, one of full embodiment in the life of its community. The nature of art as a virtual language, also articulated by John Dewey, is discussed, along with the fundamental question of what *counts* as art. The writings of the sociologists, Janet Wolff<sup>18</sup> and A.W. Foster and J.R. Blau<sup>19</sup>, the anthropologist, Arnold Rubin<sup>20</sup>, and the art theorist, Suzi Gablik<sup>21</sup>, are brought to bear on this question. These theorists encourage broadened conceptions as to what counts as art, as a consequence of which I have considered new directions or at least alternative functions or 'uses' of art in society.

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<sup>15</sup> Livingston, J.R. (1999), 'Phenomenology, Music, Nature', Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Tasmania, Hobart (Tas.).

<sup>16</sup> Other influences, those that are more specific to developments within art theory and practice, are considered in Chapter 2.

<sup>17</sup> Dewey, J. (1958), *Art as Experience*, Capricorn, New York.

<sup>18</sup> Wolff, J. (1981), *The Social Production of Art*, Macmillan, London.

<sup>19</sup> Foster, A.W. and Blau, J.R. (1989) 'Introduction' in A.W. Foster and J.R. Blau (eds.), *Art and Society: Readings in the Sociology of the Arts*, State University of the New York Press, Albany (NY). pp3-27.

<sup>20</sup> Rubin, A. (1979), 'Anthropology and the Study of Art in Contemporary Western Society: The Pasadena Tournament of Roses', in J. Cordwell (ed.), *The Visual Arts Visual and Graphic*, Mouton Publishers, The Hague, pp669-715.

<sup>21</sup> Gablik, S. (1991), *The Reenchantment of Art*, Thames and Hudson, New York.

Also in Chapter 2, I explore the role that art can play in communicating ideas that may lead to social change. Here, in addition to Dewey, I use the writing of Ernst Fischer<sup>22</sup>, Gyorgy Lukacs<sup>23</sup>, Herbert Marcuse<sup>24</sup>, and Paul Hirst<sup>25</sup>. Marcuse refers to the significance of aesthetic experience<sup>26</sup> in art as being essential for the well-being of the individual and society. Even in the 'pure' dimension of aesthetics, Marcuse conceives art to be essentially public in nature and function. The role of aesthetic experience as it pertains to an artistic aspiration of social change will be explored in this chapter.

Finally, Chapter 2 looks at the work of artists who, in fact, deploy their art as vehicles for social change. In particular, I detail the work of such artists who utilise multimedia as both an artistic and a socio-political instrument: namely, Joseph Beuys, Jenny Holzer, Shirin Neshat and Krzysztof Wodiczko. Holzer uses multimedia as a vehicle for social critique; Neshat's multi-screen video projections highlight gender inequalities, particularly in respect of her homeland of Iran, while those of Wodiczko transform buildings into powerful public political statements. These artists have generated strong public support for their respective causes through creative and skilful use of new art media.

The third chapter, 'Art and Ecology', begins with a description of Gablik's work, in this case, of her specifically ecological

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<sup>22</sup> Fischer, E. (1963), *The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach*, Penguin, Harmondsworth (Eng.).

<sup>23</sup> Kiralyfalvi, B. (1975), *The Aesthetics of Gyorgy Lukacs*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ).

<sup>24</sup> Marcuse, H. (1978), *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, Macmillan, London.

<sup>25</sup> Hirst, P. (1974), *Knowledge and the Curriculum: A Collection of Philosophical Papers*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London.

ideas. I also consider the ecophilosophers and other theorists of the environment movement whose writings have given impetus and direction to my thought and art. They provide the philosophical underpinning that has merged with the impulses from my personal history, as described in Chapter 1, and the influences from art and art theory, as described in Chapter 2.

Phenomenological theory is considered here in greater depth, though with the focus less on the thought of Merleau-Ponty and more on the 'grounded', more obviously 'ecological' phenomenology of Martin Heidegger and David Abram. Here too, I critically assess the notion of an 'ecological impulse', as advanced by Peter Hay<sup>27</sup>, and I consider the work of the phenomenologically inspired deep ecologists, notably Arne Naess<sup>28</sup> and Warwick Fox<sup>29</sup>. I have also read in the area of the fusion of science with ecological spirituality, in particular the work of the American theorist, Fritjof Capra<sup>30</sup>, and the Jungian ecological spirituality of the Australian, David Tacey<sup>31</sup>. Charlene Spretnak<sup>32</sup> provides a link back into the world of art, the nature and function of art being one of her main concerns.

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<sup>26</sup> 'Aesthetic' comes from the Greek word *aesthetikos*. I refer here to a 'heightened sensory experience' rather than the form of philosophy dealing with art and its forms and effects.

<sup>27</sup> *Op.cit.*, pp1-25.

<sup>28</sup> Naess, A. (1973), 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary', *Inquiry*, 16, pp95-100; Naess, A. (1984), 'Intuition, Intrinsic Value and Deep Ecology', *The Ecologist*, 14, pp201-203.

<sup>29</sup> Fox, W. (1990), *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology; Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism*, Shambhala, Boston (Mass.). Fox's book is of particular importance in my personal history. Having read it on the recommendation of a friend in 1997, it opened up a world of ideas and inspiration that gave new direction to my art.

<sup>30</sup> Capra, F. (1992), *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism*, Flamingo, London; Capra, F. (1997), *The Web of Life*, Flamingo, London.

<sup>31</sup> Tacey, D. (1995), *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia* HarperCollins, Blackburn, (Vic.).

<sup>32</sup> Spretnak, C. (1997), *The Resurgence of the Real: Body, Nature, and Place in a Hypermodern World*, Addison-Wesley, Reading (Mass.).

Chapter 4 provides a consideration of ‘ecology’ in ‘ecological art’. I critique what I believe to be the inauthentic ascription of ‘ecological’ intensions in respect of much art that proclaims itself to be ‘environmental art’. For much ‘environmental art’ so-called imposes itself permanently – and negatively – upon actual ecological processes. It leaves an unacceptably large ‘ecological footprint’. I wish to avoid such contradictions in my own ‘ecological art’. As exemplars of what might be achieved through the practice of an ecologically-motivated public art, I consider, in this chapter, the work of Joseph Beuys (this time in its specifically ecological dimensions), Andy Goldsworthy, Jill Peck, Robert Gschwantner, and the collaboration that won the 1999 Governor of Osaka Prefecture Prize.

The fifth chapter of the dissertation, ‘My Art Project and its Component Artworks’, details the physical outcomes of my research - exhibitions, installations, events and projections. These have been outlined chronologically. My multimedia art has been designed so as to be demountable and, though I prefer to work in non-gallery situations, it is also adaptable to gallery venues where circumstances demand. All my art projects have involved collaborative synergies, variously with artists working in different modes, scientists, academics from other disciplines, members of statutory bodies, and personnel from industry. Each of my art projects is discussed in relative detail. Attention is particularly given to the nature of the collaborations – how these have been forged, the expectations of the partners, what problems have occurred, whether expectations have been met, how appropriate to project goals have been the artistic modes used, and the potential of such collaborations for future projects.

The exegesis concludes with an assessment of the degree to which the research goals have been realised and an outline of the direction which I expect my work to take as a consequence of lessons learned and discoveries made in this research.



## CHAPTER 1

### Background Influences

When I was a child in Tasmania my father ‘tilled the soil’ after the fashion of his own father, a Chinese immigrant who, I imagine, established a loving relationship with the soil in the traditional way as a means of making contact with a new and strange place. I trace back my empathy with the living world to my memories of working with my father. From him I acquired ‘the soul-nurturing tangibility of gardening’<sup>1</sup>. My mother, an Englishwoman from Somerset, deeply empathised with The Garden. She was a creator of aesthetic spaces and from her intimate garden sensibility I understood the depths to which it is possible to form attachments to place.

In considering the impulse behind my parents’ gardening activities, I am convinced that they were not indulging purely private dreams. I think instead that their impulse was primarily social. In the case of my mother it was to create beauty to be enjoyed by others, whilst for my father, it was the garden’s usefulness as a source – and a symbol – of life-sustenance that drove his endeavours. It was a socialist household in which I grew up and the principle of giving first priority to the needs of fellow human beings was accepted by me at an early age. My upbringing was also characterised by an ethos of social activism and probably explains the social focus of my art.

From the interplay of my bi-racial background I can identify a spirituality which seems to have been a constant presence. Perhaps from my Chinese background I have adopted the Taoist view of the universe as ‘the same as’ or ‘inseparable from’ ourselves. The Tao, described by Allan Watts as ‘the flowing

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<sup>1</sup> Hay, P. (2001), ‘Dinoflagellates and Art: Jane Quon’s Marine Installations’, *Artlink*, 21 (1), pp19-21.

course of nature'<sup>2</sup>, has surfaced in my art through the metaphor of water.

In my last years at school, I became a passionate bushwalker. My ventures into the Tasmanian wilderness at that time gave full expression to the values instilled in childhood regarding empathy with nature. But subsequent experiences in the Tasmanian bush, far from reinforcing my earlier perceptions of its idyllic state, in fact provided new perceptions which alarmed me intensely. My earlier view of the world – specifically of the Tasmanian wilderness – was shattered when, during the early 1990s, I worked as a seed gatherer in tree-felling operations for the Forestry Commission (now Forestry Tasmania) near Wayatinah. I still feel ambivalent about the experience. While I must confess to having felt a sense of awe when confronted by the drama of a large tree's fall, the feeling was accompanied afterwards by an overriding sense of despair at the devastation. This despair, and the realisation that I was witnessing a mere microcosm of a universal practice, raised grave concerns on my part at the catastrophic consequences of human actions of various kinds upon the ecosystem as a whole.

My attention then turned to the environment underwater. Prior to my seed gathering work, I had taken up scuba diving. This gave me access to a new world of extraordinary beauty and wonder. My sensations under the water matched in their intensity those responses to the Tasmanian wilderness which I had experienced during my bushwalking days of the late 1960s. The new underwater world which I discovered in 1991, however, contrasted dramatically with the 'Tasmanian wilderness' which I was concurrently experiencing in the logging coupes. I felt somehow a party to the destruction of that changing environment.

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<sup>2</sup> Watts, A. (1975), *TAO: The Watercourse Way*, Pantheon, New York, p49.

I began operating a dive and fishing charter business out of the port of Triabunna and around Maria Island on Tasmania's East Coast. The intense experience of life below the water's surface heightened my regard for the marine environment and my concern for its future.

It is my artistic goal that, through manipulation of medium and content, my work may facilitate a 'movement of the mind' with regard to an ecological consciousness. Such an intangible sense of movement might itself seem almost tidal, the mind of the viewer paralleling my underwater sensations of constantly moving in and out of space and spacelessness, of weight and weightlessness, of pleasure and fear.

Gaston Bachelard has written:

by changing space, by leaving the space of one's usual sensibilities, one enters into communication with a space that is physically invigorating. "Neither in the desert nor on the bottom of the sea does one's spirit remain sealed and invisible." This change of concrete space can no longer be a mere mental operation that could be compared with consciousness of geometrical relativity. For we do not change place, we change our nature...by changing space, by leaving the space of one's usual sensitivities, one enters into a communication with a space that is psychically innovating<sup>3</sup>.

This encapsulates my own experience when diving at 40 metres below the surface of Mercury Passage. Bachelard and Diolé<sup>4</sup> are describing an experience of the sublime, an experience, they argue, more easily found in the deep sea (and the desert) than in everyday human spaces.

My experience beneath the surface of the water convinces me that Bachelard and Diolé are correct when they assert that under the water sublime experiences can occur time and time again. As

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<sup>3</sup> Bachelard, G. (1964), *The Poetics of Space*, Beacon, Boston (Mass.), p206.

the eighteenth century philosopher, Immanuel Kant, observed: 'The sublime is to be found in an object even devoid of form, so far as it immediately involves, or else by its presence provokes, a representation of limitlessness, yet with a super-added thought of its totality.'<sup>5</sup> Reading Kant's words, it is hard to believe that he too had not experienced the world deep below the ocean's surface.

Deep-diving in Mercury Passage I experience a heightened sense of space at the same time, paradoxically, that I experience a feeling of spacelessness. Most diving accidents, according to the American author, Barry Lopez, 'happen at the mysterious surface, a wafer-thin realm where air bounds water, where light suddenly changes flux, ambient sound changes register, and the body passes through a membrane fraught with possibility.'<sup>6</sup> On first entering the water I am acutely conscious of my bodily reactions: intuitive responses triggered to optimise my chances of survival. But as I descend, this enhanced bodily consciousness is supplanted by an awareness of the world outside the self, of the boundless void around me. Yet, despite this sense of vast space my actual vision is restricted, both peripherally by my mask, and by the limited range afforded by the underwater situation. A feeling of spacelessness and confinement coexist.

Corresponding to this spatial ambiguity is an ambiguity concerning weight. There is an elated sense of weightlessness, of buoyancy, of there being no bottom and no top. It is a sense of perfect equilibrium. However, there is a great pressure of water

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<sup>4</sup> The quote within the quote is by Philippe Diolé, upon whom Bachelard draws.

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Thomson, J. (1999), 'The Sublime Moment: The Rise of the "Critical Watchman"', in *Sublime: The Darkness and the Light, Works from the Arts Council Collection*, South Bank Centre, London, pp22-23.

<sup>6</sup> Lopez, B. (1998), *About this Life: Journeys on the Threshold of Memory*, Harvill, London, pp27-28.

upon me, and my awareness of this physical pressure fluctuates. One can spend a maximum of only five minutes at a depth of forty metres. Regulations specify decompression stops while surfacing. These provide 5-10 minutes of hanging weightless, surrounded at depth by a dense velvet opacity, and closer to the surface by a brilliant blue light flickering above. Again one experiences the paradoxical coexistence of an extreme weight of pressure and a liberating sense of weightlessness.

Ambiguities within the external sensations of space and weight are accompanied by internal oscillations between pleasure and fear. For me, the underwater world remains, basically, a world of unfamiliarity. Nothing in my experience of it provides a correspondence with the more familiar world above. The experience is enhanced by the oxygen 'high' which one may experience while deep diving. I move from an unawareness of my body to an acute awareness of it. On the descent the sensation is almost claustrophobic, though it becomes less so on the bottom. The more clouded the water is - at all depths - the more life it contains. Clouded water thus can be a source of profound engagement with the living world. I feel amphibian, privileged to be in other creatures' worlds. Yet the same awareness - and this within an environment with such low visibility - makes me cognisant of the fact that some of this life is dangerous. Such fluctuating responses, between pleasure and fear, are also described by Lopez:

something, most certainly, happens to a diver's emotions underwater. It is not merely a side effect of the pleasing, vaguely erotic sensation of water pressure on the body... It is some complicated run of emotions, together with the constant proximity of real terror, exhilaration of another sort entirely.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p27.

These experiences seem to me now to have been the major determinants of the content of my art, and of the role that I should play as an artist.

Yet, whilst experiences that can be interpreted as ‘sublime’ motivate the direction and focus of my art, I am not seeking to *create* or *re-make* the sublime in my art. I make a fundamental distinction between the attempt through art to render descriptions of a specific sublime experience *per se* and ‘an attempt to insinuate oneself into the world to work with given phenomena in order to elicit meanings and evoke significance’.<sup>8</sup> Urging a particular mode of interaction with ‘the phenomenal world’, J.R. Livingston writes:

Allow your shell of self-interest to become permeable, let the concerns and interests of others interpenetrate... Extend a hand and discover significance! Accept the proffered invitation and reap the experiential reward!<sup>9</sup>

In Livingston’s formulation the experiencing subject is a co-creator of the experience. The experiences within art which have most closely paralleled my experiences within the underwater world (in the sense of ‘experiential reward’ rather than ‘sublime experience’) have stemmed from personal encounters with the sculptural works of Anish Kapoor.

My experience of Kapoor’s *Adam* (1988-89), which I saw – or rather profoundly experienced – at the Tate Modern in London in 2000, fitted Livingston’s categorisation of the ‘experiential reward’. This experience was one of a heightened desire physically to engage; to change the way I saw and felt. It was an activist impulse; in essence, aesthetic rather than sublime. Kapoor activated for me a desire to put my hand into the void in his sculpture and by doing so to experience a oneness with it. The

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<sup>8</sup> Livingston, J.R. (1999), ‘Phenomenology, Music, Nature’, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Tasmania, Hobart (Tas.). p23.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

experience, in other words, drove my action. I seek in my own art to draw people into an experience of nature that elicits a similar active response.



Figure 1.

**Anish Kapoor**  
*Adam*, 1988-89  
Sandstone and pigment  
119x102x236cm  
Tate Gallery, London

Kapoor is a sculptor whose work evokes a unique sensation of space and emptiness. This is epitomised in *Adam*. He has written: 'I have always been drawn to a notion of fear, to a notion of vertigo, of falling, of being pulled inwards'<sup>10</sup>. This is a statement which could be describing aspects of my own below-water experience. Kapoor's work has been described by Simon Bolitho thus:

In *Adam*, Kapoor creates an area of pure darkness in a flat face of pinkish sandstone. It is an unsettling work, partly because it is unclear what we are looking at. How deep does the hollow extend? Is it really a three-dimensional space, or a surface of impossibly black paint? While for some the void may suggest nihilistic absence, for the artist it signifies potential. It might represent the womb, or the moment just before the creation of the universe.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Bolitho, S. (2000), 'Ghost 1977, Adam 1988-9', in J. Burton (ed.), *Between Cinema and a Hard Place*, exhibition catalogue, Tate Modern, London, p14.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

I was drawn to its ‘impossibly black’ rectangular void. The piece drew me viscerally and spiritually into it. It is a work which must be experienced directly in order to derive any sense of its strange ‘pull’. A catalogue photograph is but a lame souvenir. Yet in experiencing the work, I found it incomprehensible: I was projecting my hand into a space which was unfathomable and seemingly boundless – akin to being underwater. I felt that I had become as one with the piece, merging with its essence and, as Bachelard suggests, entering ‘into a communication with a space that is psychically innovating.’

My project, however, ranges beyond an attempt to evoke the aesthetics of the underwater world. For along with the heightened aesthetic experience of being in the ocean, I simultaneously become aware, when diving, of the serious degradation of that environment. I become aware, in fact, that degradation is as much a characteristic of the marine world as it is of the terrestrial world above. This awareness has not only formed the impetus for my art practice. It has, in turn, and as an integral part of my art practice, taken me into the domains of philosophy and science – and into such prosaic fields as public environmental policy. Later in my exegesis I will examine artistic and philosophical influences upon my work. Here, though, I will confine my discussion to the apparently ‘non-artistic’ scientific, environmental and public policy influences upon my project.

Through my own diving and fishing experiences in and around Mercury Passage, I have perceived a need to respond to the issue of the introduction of marine organisms into alien aquatic environments. In recent years at least 170 species of exotic marine organisms have been translocated into Australian waters, with significant implications for Australia’s burgeoning marine-



farming industry and for marine tourism.<sup>12</sup> Whilst not all are dangerous, some marine organisms also pose a risk to humans. Observations have shown an apparent global increase in the frequency, intensity and geographic distribution of paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP), an illness with fifteen percent mortality resulting from the consumption of shellfish products contaminated with alkaloid toxins from eleven species of plankton dinoflagellates.<sup>13</sup> Thus 'there is increasing concern in recent years, in Australia and internationally, at the real and potential impacts from introduced marine pests translocated by ships.'<sup>14</sup>

With 12,000 islands within its territories and a coastline of 30,000 kilometres<sup>15</sup>, Australia relies heavily on the shipping trade. Over 11,000 vessels visit Australia each year from over 600 overseas locations, arriving at 65 ports around the country:

...there is now no question that shipping is essential to Australia and ballast water is essential to shipping. Ships take on ballast water to keep them stable and allow them to operate efficiently

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<sup>12</sup> Walters, S.(1996), *Ballast Water, Hull Fouling and Exotic Marine Organism Introductions via Ships – A Victorian Study*, Environmental Protection Authority, Victoria. Australia, p3: 'Sea going vessels pose a risk of introducing exotic species from overseas, of transferring exotic species from one domestic port to another, and of moving indigenous species from one Australian location to another. The introduction of marine organisms into Australian waters threatens ecological communities and the integrity of the natural environment, health, aquaculture, tourism and enjoyment of coastal amenity.'

<sup>13</sup> Hallegraeff, G. (1998), *Transport of Toxic Dinoflagellates via Ships' Ballast Water*. Marine Ecology Progress Series, Vol.168: 297-309, p297. PSP in the Australian region was unknown until the late 1980s when the first toxic dinoflagellate blooms appeared in the ports of Hobart, Melbourne and Adelaide. Explanations for this apparent global increase include an increase in scientific awareness and, hence, an increase in identification of problems, and stimulation of dinoflagellate blooms by increased coastal eutrophication. In a limited number of cases, translocation of non-indigenous estuarine dinoflagellate species across oceanic boundaries either via ships' ballast water or translocation of shellfish products, appears more probable.

<sup>14</sup> Paterson, D. (1999), *The Ballast Water Problem – Where to from Here?* Eco-Ports Monograph series No.19, Ports Corporation Queensland, Brisbane, p7.

<sup>15</sup> Author unknown. (1998), *Facts About Australia's Ocean*, CSIRO Marine Research, Hobart, (Tas.), p1.

and safely during voyages when they have little or no cargo on board.<sup>16</sup>

Australia is one of the world's largest importers of ballast water, of which, it is estimated, 10 billion tonnes are carried around the globe each year.<sup>17</sup>

International action in response to ballast dumping practices occurs principally through the activities of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and its Marine Environmental Protection Committee (MEPC).<sup>18</sup> MEPC has, over the last ten years, been working toward mandatory regulations – through discussions and research largely led by Australia – in an internationally binding agreement on the management of ballast water applicable to countries concerned with ballast dumping.<sup>19</sup> However, implementation of international treaties remains a slow process.<sup>20</sup> Public education, both formal and non-formal, therefore, is considered 'critical for achieving environmental and ethical awareness, values and attitudes, skills and behaviour consistent with sustainable development and for effective public

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<sup>16</sup> Paterson, *op cit*, p7.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p7. Current research on practical measures of control for preventing the introduction of unwanted organisms and pathogens from ship's ballast water are: chemical treatment of ballast water, oxygen deprivation, tank coating and changes to ships design.

<sup>18</sup> The International Maritime Organisation is a specialised agency of the United Nations, and is responsible for measures to improve maritime safety, improve the level of safety of international shipping and to prevent marine pollution from ships. It was established via the Geneva Convention in 1948, and is made up of 157 member states, meeting every two years.

<sup>19</sup> International Maritime Organisation. (1998), *Alien Invaders - Putting a Stop to the Ballast Water Hitch-hikers*, IMO Issues Document, Oct., IMO, London.

<sup>20</sup> The normal procedure for adopting amendments to an international treaty is by means of 'explicit acceptance'. This means that the amendments enter into force so many months after being accepted by a specified number of Parties to the original Convention. The tacit acceptance procedure means that amendments – which are nearly always adopted unanimously – enter into force on a set date unless they are specifically rejected by a specified number of countries.

International Maritime Organisation, 'Why is the IMO so Slow?' <http://www.imo.org>

participation in decision-making.<sup>21</sup> It is also critical that international strategies are complemented by national and locally specific remediation regimes. Marine biologist, Gustaaf Hallegraeff, maintains that the taking up of water into ships' ballast during seasonal plankton blooms in Korea and Japan<sup>22</sup> '...is a plausible explanation' for the introduction and establishment of the toxic dinoflagellates now found within Tasmania's Derwent Estuary.<sup>23</sup>

My growing concern in relation to this issue has spilled over in very significant ways into my art. Locally, I have established art-science collaborations with Dr. Hallegraeff, and internationally with the IMO and MEPC. In these collaborations, and in other projects, I have attempted to raise awareness within the wider community as well as within international shipping circles, of the issue of ballast water dumping as a major environmental problem. However, it has become increasingly apparent that this issue cannot be seen in isolation, for the problem exists within both a larger marine ecology context and a larger environmental policy context. Two policy documents have had a particular influence upon my perception of the issue: one global in scope, the other national.

In terms of global policy, the key framework is that set up at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Here the key policy document is *Agenda 21*, the opening statement of which proclaims:

Humanity stands at a defining moment in history. We are confronted with a perpetuation of disparities between and within nations, a worsening of poverty, hunger, ill-health and

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<sup>21</sup> Agenda 21, Chapter 36.3:

<http://www.icg.apc.org/habitat/agenda21/ch-36.html>

<sup>22</sup> Hallegraeff, *op cit*, p297.

<sup>23</sup> *Asterias amurensis* [Northern Pacific Seastar], *Carcinus maenas* [European Shore Crab] *Undaria pinnatifida* [Japanese kelp] have been translocated within Tasmania after being introduced via fouling of ships hulls or through ballast dumping.

illiteracy, and the continuing deterioration of the ecosystems on which we depend for our well-being. However integration of environment and development concerns and greater attention to them will lead to the fulfilment of basic needs, improved living standards for all, better protected and managed ecosystems and a safer, and more prosperous future. No nation can achieve this on its own; but together we can – in global partnership for sustainable development<sup>24</sup>.

*Agenda 21* is a charter which contains an internationally recognised framework of objectives and actions for implementing the principles contained within the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development. It is a dynamic program which calls upon governments to adopt national strategies for sustainable development through wide participation, involving non-government organisations and the public.<sup>25</sup> The document also calls for creative multidisciplinary methods for achieving its ends. ‘Formal and non-formal’ methods should be employed to make this communication effective.<sup>26</sup> *Agenda 21* has had a considerable impact upon my thinking and my art practice, particularly in its advocacy of global partnerships and of non-formal communication as important devices in the battle against global ecological degradation.

In terms of Australia’s marine environment specifically, issues concerning sustainable development have been highlighted by the Australian Government in publications such as *Australia’s Ocean Policy*<sup>27</sup>. Management of oceans within Australia is based on principles which integrate scientific knowledge of ecological processes with economic, environmental, social, cultural and other factors.

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<sup>24</sup> Agenda 21, Chapter 1.1.1:

<http://www.igc.apc.org/habitat/agenda21/ch-01.html>

<sup>25</sup> Agenda 21, Chapter 1 Preamble:

<http://www.igc.apc.org/habitat/agenda21/ch-01.html>

<sup>26</sup> Agenda 21, Chapter 36:

<http://www.igc.apc.org/habitat/agenda21/ch-36.html>

<sup>27</sup> Environment Australia. (1998), *Australia’s Ocean Policy: Report of the Ministerial Advisory Group*, Canberra, Environment Australia, p27.

By making a commitment in the Australian Oceans Policy to 'decision-making and on-ground actions', the Federal Government has set a framework within which 'a stewardship ethic for our marine environment can develop'.<sup>28</sup> The Government recommends that both private industry and the community take responsibility for the care of our oceans and coasts and 'change their behaviour accordingly'.<sup>29</sup> My research – and my artwork generally – is a response to this sentiment.

There is an increasingly perceived need today for important global issues to be tackled from many perspectives, utilising collaborative, multidisciplinary approaches. Thus significant synergies have developed in recent years between art and other disciplines, and in particular between art and science. Whilst acknowledging that issues pertaining to the marine ecosystem are rightly seen to constitute important matters for science to address, my research aims to demonstrate that art has enormous potential to promote awareness of the urgency of such issues to the public at large.

I have discussed above both the subjective and objective influences that have shaped my artistic philosophies and priorities. Underlying these is my commitment to a praxis of social change. In considering the capacity for art to effect social change, one is entering the realm of values – of deep-seated core beliefs and attitudes. Thus my art is directed, at least in part, to contributing to a process of attitudinal change in relation to marine ecology.

Since it is my intention to help shift values in the direction of ecological sustainability, I have to ask myself: 'Who do I need to

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p41.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

reach?’ In response to this question, two distinct population cohorts become apparent. The first of these is the public taken as a whole; the second is that stratum of decision-makers whose actions have, negatively or positively, had the greatest impact upon the future wellbeing of the marine environment. It has become clear to me that taking art to ‘non-art’ audiences requires different strategies from those conventionally applied to the gallery situation. In the former, the artist becomes a creative interlocutor, neither employing art as propaganda, nor setting up a ‘critical distance’ between artist and viewer. This has had implications for the modes of art which I have employed and the venues for their presentation.

Historically, printmaking was seen as a powerful means of providing widely accessible, ‘democratic’ images. As such, printmaking initially seemed to suit my project. I soon moved, however, to experiment with large-scale multimedia installation, feeling that this form might possess the greatest capacity to reach a large, non-traditional (in an art-viewing sense) audience. It became evident that this seemed to be the case. To illustrate this point, I refer to a 1999 exhibition of my prints in a conventional gallery format. Over the duration of a week, the show was attended by approximately 150 people, a figure regarded by the gallery authorities as quite a good level of visitation. In the same year my first multimedia performance was held in a lecture theatre setting and was attended by as many people on a single night. It became clear to me that the cross-art<sup>30</sup> and the art-science collaboration, along with the large, multimedia mode of artistic presentation, potentially provided much more effective means for the realisation of my goals. With such means I could reach larger

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<sup>30</sup> I prefer this term to the more commonly used ‘interdisciplinary art’, because the latter connotes narrowly defined academic distinctions that seem inappropriate, not only to the concept of ecology and the relational complexity that word implies, but also to the scope and the activist intent of my own project.

viewing audiences and communicate more directly with the scientists and policy-makers whose decisions directly impinged upon the marine domain.

It also suggested that I should present my art in high-visibility public spaces, rather than exclusively within conventional gallery spaces. In keeping with my ecological orientation I also conceived it as a value that I should minimise the site-impact of my works by making them demountable, portable, and perhaps temporary in form.

My project has not only been concerned with the realisation of the end product *per se*. The idea of collaboration with other artists and with scientists and policy-makers has come to form my working praxis. As such, I have come to regard the working process itself as the provider of significant rewards. In the deployment of a range of modes and methods and in the involvement of different people, all kinds of synergies, energies, and unanticipated outcomes become possible. In my collaborations with artists, I have sought outcomes which reconcile optimum public accessibility and artistic integrity. These are not, in any case, necessarily contradictory aims.

Increasingly over the past decade there has been a reaching-out by individuals and organisations professionally involved with ecological matters to join with other people who work in radically different ways from their own. There is a 'widening of the front'. The American art theorist, Suzi Gablik, has crystallised the case for the involvement of art workers in such synergistic enterprises<sup>31</sup>. In my own case, I have the testimony of Dr. Ehsan Mesbahi, a marine engineer with the (UK) University of Newcastle's MARTOB – 'On Board Treatment of Ballast' –

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<sup>31</sup> Gablik, S. (1991), *The Reenchantment of Art*, Thames & Hudson, New York, pp76-131.

Consortium. Dr. Mesbahi, with whom I shared a session at the 2002 meeting of the International Maritime Organisation in London, has written in correspondence to me that:

the combination of engineers, scientists, technologists, biologists, environmentalists and economists that constitutes MARTOB has always thought that important environmental issues like the introduction of non-indigenous species need to be publicised and presented to the outside world by any possible way of communicating. The one that we are aware of and frequently use is a kind of 'technical language' which, generally speaking, may not be very appealing to many members of the public. The power of 'artistic language' and its great combination of audio and visual effects would definitely attract more attention and increase public awareness. Human cognition, perception and memorisation of events by using visual patterns associated with proper background sound effects is a lot more successful than textual, mathematical, cold and bold presentations!<sup>32</sup>

In crossing disciplinary boundaries in this way we are contributing to an emerging collective consciousness. Within this collective human consciousness are many social and individual 'contracts' forged in response to the spectrum of ecological concerns. Historians, poets, ethicists, sociologists, scientists, artists all can espouse, in their own ways, deep wisdom concerning our ecological future. It is with these kindred spirits that the praxis of my art is linked, and with whom I wish to engage dialectically.

In Hobart I have begun working, at the levels of both art practice and ecological communication, with the Hobart-based poet, essayist and academic, Dr. Peter Hay. Hay, who uses literary texts as tools for the teaching of environmental thought at the University of Tasmania, shares my interest in the educational potential of ecological art. I am also in contact with Dr. Martin Huehner, Director of the Environmental Studies Program at Hiram College, Ohio. Huehner applies artistic methodologies in the teaching of environmental studies.

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<sup>32</sup> Mesbahi, E. (2002), Pers. Comm., 14 February.



Collaboration has confirmed my view of my own art as a communicative device. It also raises other questions. Does art function as a language? What is the status of art as a unique way of knowing? These and other theoretical questions relevant to my work are considered in the next chapter. In addition, I will examine in more detail the notion of art as a generator of social change, and I will discuss the work of artists who, through their work, have sought to achieve social outcomes.

## CHAPTER 2

### Art, Values, and Social Change

Many Modernist art movements of the twentieth century epitomised the maxim of ‘art for art’s sake’. This conception as to what art ‘is’, along with the commensurate image of the artist as outsider remains entrenched within the popular consciousness – as well as within the minds of large numbers of artists who prefer it that way. My research challenges that paradigm. My research is based instead on the maxim of ‘art for society’s sake’. Though I am at pains to eschew the pitfalls inherent in an extreme ‘art for society’s sake’ position – the fundamentalism that reduces art to mere propaganda<sup>1</sup> – I nevertheless critique the equally extreme ‘art for art’s sake’ credo: ‘The view of *l’art pour l’art* [that] ...denies not only the moral and social usefulness of art but its every possible practical function as well.’<sup>2</sup>

This research taps, perhaps, an historical function of art in society. Throughout history and across cultures, art has embodied and communicated values – whether dominant or subversive – in such domains as religion, cosmology, ideology, politics and

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<sup>1</sup> It can be argued that all creative output is, at one level, propaganda, in that it necessarily embodies social assumptions, and this is no less so for artworks that make the deliberate claim to be value-free. Nevertheless, ‘propaganda’ is generally applied to art that seeks to promote an ideologically partisan perspective of politics, narrowly defined – hence my association of it with the word ‘fundamentalism’ within the text. In this sense, then, an art that seeks to raise political awareness and to stimulate discourse, as opposed to one that seeks a simple-minded partisan conversion, is not appropriately described as ‘propaganda’. Given that almost all fine art is allusive and suggestive rather than didactic and options-foreclosing, it follows that the term ‘propaganda’ is almost never appropriately applied to fine art. This distinction is implicit in the discussion that follows in this chapter, where many of these points are elaborated.

<sup>2</sup> Hauser, A. (1982), *The Sociology of Art*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, p315.

ethics. In this role art has fulfilled an intrinsically social function. What we term 'the arts' enable us to assert identity, organise experience, derive meaning, realise aesthetic satisfaction, all in publicly-legitimate ways. As such, art may be regarded as a fundamental, even instinctual human activity. I would argue that art is also a necessary component of social construction; a major force in the formation of social values; a powerful agent in the transmission of culture.

Art possesses the capacity to perpetuate values and is capable of changing them. Historically, this has been understood by the myriad religions of the world, by political regimes and most certainly by present-day advertisers. The latter, through their choice of visual images associated with a product, are able to manipulate our choices – our values – virtually at will. This has also been understood by people seeking to undermine religions, regimes, and products in the market place.

In what ways does art function as an agent of resistance or a propagator of change? The achievement of social change through the adoption of new values occurs not only through the input of factual data, but also through the internalisation of *feelings* that inspire action for change. Of course, new values can come from the objective acquisition of scientific and other facts, but shifts in values can also arise from our affective response to particular phenomena. Affective response to a work of art is termed 'aesthetic experience': that is, sensory experience which is 'above' ordinary experience. When a work of art generates an aesthetic response in an audience it has established a fundamental condition for the communication of its message.

In the following chapter I elaborate this position, presenting a view of a function of art as a public, activist and democratic force in society. I discuss the work of art movements and individual

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practitioners who have sought, in various ways, to put such a view into practice.

### **Art as a Social Activity**

Sociologist Janet Wolff<sup>3</sup> argues that art is a social product, historically situated and produced. It is not the product of divine inspiration. Art is not, in fact, essentially different from other work, in that it is largely determined by social structure, and is shaped and constrained by prevailing political forces and technological circumstances. The notion of the artist as an individual unconstrained by institutional ties, as an heroic, often tortured and alienated soul is, Wolff argues, itself a politically-charged social construct, one intended to obscure the degree to which a work of art is socially dependent. She states, 'The concept of the artist/author as some kind of asocial being, blessed with genius, waiting for divine inspiration and exempt from all normal rules of social intercourse is therefore very much an ahistorical and limited one'<sup>4</sup>. In fact, argues Wolff, because of their marginalisation, today's artists *are* likely to be alienated and isolated, 'but this does not mean that it is the essence of art to transcend life, and to surpass the real, the social, and even the personal'.<sup>5</sup> A sociological perspective necessarily focuses upon social structure, and it is to be expected that a 'sociological' definition of art would contain such characteristics as those outlined above. Such a view encourages me to step back and look at what is considered 'art' in our society.

Suzi Gablik also argues that the dominant view of art as the socially detached product of an asocial individual genius is not a

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<sup>3</sup> Wolff, J. (1981), *The Social Production of Art*, Macmillan, London.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p12.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

universal conception of the role and function of art but the expression of an ideology of creative production that is specific to industrial modernism:

Modernism was the art of the industrial age. It did not inspire what Octavio Paz called 'creative participation'. Rather, it exalted above all the complete autonomy of art, an art-for-art's sake that severed bonds with society and aimed itself instead at advancing art history. Concerned with the object as the chief source of value, modernism encouraged isolation, distancing, and in a certain sense, depreciation of the Other. Its core structure of feeling was alienation... The dominant modes of thinking in our society have conditioned us to think of art as specialized objects created not for moral or practical or social reasons, but simply to be contemplated and enjoyed for the sake of individual pleasure. Autonomy, however, has condemned art to social impotence.<sup>6</sup>

Gablik criticises the 'deep dualism between public and private [that] existed within modernism, which severed any connections between them and colored our view of art as basically a "private" affair'<sup>7</sup>. She takes as paradigmatic of this view – whose time, she thinks, is up – the following claim made by Christo in an interview published in *Flash Art*:

The work is irrational and perhaps irresponsible. Nobody needs it. The work is a huge individualistic gesture that is entirely decided by me... One of the greatest contributions of modern art is the notion of individualism... The work of art is a scream of freedom.<sup>8</sup>

It is Gablik's contention that we stand at a point of time in which society is undergoing a paradigm shift that involves 'a sense of being part of something larger than oneself', that this paradigm shift 'has dramatic consequences for our understanding of art', and that, as exemplified by the standpoint articulated above by Christo, 'we've finally come up against the limits of that particular paradigm'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Rifkin, N., and Gablik, S. (1992), 'Value Beyond the Aesthetic', a panel discussion in *Art Papers*, March-April, p28.

<sup>7</sup> Gablik, S. (1992), *The Reenchantment of Art*, Thames and Hudson, New York, p171.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Rifkin and Gablik, *op.cit.*, p28.

We need instead, Gablik argues, 'a connective aesthetics' in which 'the meaning of the work lies neither in the observer, nor in what is observed, but in the relationship between the two'.<sup>10</sup> She makes a case for an art 'that is oriented toward dynamic participation and that seeks to overcome modernism's historic failure to connect with the archetypal other'. Such an art 'will have to deal with living contexts, transforming the experience of exclusion into one of creative empowerment in the community [and requiring] an experience with reciprocal listening'.<sup>11</sup> Of course, an art that is interactive, that involves 'being in some kind of open conversation with the audience'<sup>12</sup>, is not necessarily an art of the specialist audiences that frequent museums and art galleries.

Sociologists Arnold Foster and Judith Blau stress the centrality of art within cultural creation, and thus the cultural specificity of art. 'Attuned to our own place and time', they write, 'we sometimes forget that art is universal and has existed since the Paleolithic Age'.<sup>13</sup> What is considered art in one culture is not always considered art within another. Consider a culture where art is an integral part of life, and not a specialised activity for an esoteric caste of gifted individual creators. If ceremony is essential to the fabric of that culture, then ceremony may be the most significant medium of artistic expression.<sup>14</sup> Foster and Blau are critical of

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<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p29.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p30.

<sup>13</sup> Foster, A.W., and Blau, J.R. (1989), 'Introduction', in A.W. Foster and J.R. Blau (eds.), *Art and Society: Readings in the Sociology of the Arts*, State University of New York Press, Albany (NY), p3.

<sup>14</sup> A good demonstration of the validity of the case for cultural specificity of art is provided by the Pasadena Tournament of Roses, 'a vast floral pageant and parade held on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January since 1890... [It] features up to sixty self-propelled floats... decorated exclusively with fresh flowers and vegetable materials in their natural state... the parade is televised by two national networks and a number of

what they call 'psychological' theories of art. Psychological (or individualist) theories of art fail because 'the need for aesthetic experience can be satisfied without creating art, such as in the appreciation of nature'. Moreover, 'the artwork is seldom treated in any way except as a complex of stimuli', which is of 'little use for anyone who wants to understand art as something which acts in society and, in turn, is influenced and shaped by society'.<sup>15</sup> Anthropologist Arnold Rubin's view is similar. He is critical of approaches to art history that assume an evolutionary progression from the primitives of the past to the contemporary 'geniuses and masterpieces' of the modern period – and, overall to a 'preoccupation with the exceptional and the extraordinary'.<sup>16</sup>

For Rubin, affective response is not confined to art but occurs within religion, ritual and symbolism. In fact, his analysis would seem to blur the distinctions between these domains. In 1984, a friend recalled witnessing London National Gallery patrons in front of Leonardo's large chalk drawing of *The Virgin and Child with St. Anne* [fig 2] so moved by the experience that they fell to their knees before the work in prayer. It was impossible to say where artistic response ended and religious response began. In religious experience (as in love) a state of heightened awareness can be achieved precisely because one is imbued with a profound sense of meaning. Artworks can be significant in the same way because – in the context of great works – they can also inculcate in the viewer an unmediated sense of profound meaning.

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independent local stations... The total estimated television audience is over 100,000,000 persons' (Rubin, A. [1979], 'Anthropology and the Study of Art in Contemporary Western Society: The Pasadena Tournament of Roses', in J. Cordwell, [ed.], *The Visual Arts: Plastic and Graphic*, Moutin, The Hague, pp 672-673). Rubin discusses the Pasadena Tournament of Roses at length in support of his argument in defence of the cultural relativity of art.

<sup>15</sup> Foster and Blau, *op.cit.*, p6.

<sup>16</sup> Rubin, *op.cit.*, p669.



This *sense* of meaning is different from the *description* of meaning that the scientist may provide. Aesthetic experience bypasses words and numbers – the tools of objective description.<sup>17</sup> But because a particular meaning cannot be described or quantified does not mean that it does not exist. It could be stated that values and behaviours inspired by love and religious experience form the very foundations of people's lives. That the sensations of love and religious experience are



Figure 2.

**Leonardo da Vinci**  
*Cartoon for the Virgin and Child*  
*with St. Anne* (c 1500)  
Charcoal on paper  
139x107cm  
National Gallery, London

essentially 'aesthetic' in kind begs the question: Can aesthetic experience of art inspire values and behaviours of the same import and to the same degree as love and religious experience?

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<sup>17</sup> Though words too can, as in literature, evoke the aesthetic response.

An important theorist of the integral place of art within a culture was John Dewey. He asserted that art should be intimately tied to communal experience as a social and human necessity. It should reflect and celebrate common experience and do so – crucially – in the form of aesthetic experience. Dewey argued, in fact, that ‘the live creature’<sup>18</sup> requires, as a fundamental human need, social circumstances and structures that could facilitate an aesthetic interpretation of their own communal state. When art becomes the preserve of an ‘aesthetically-credentialed’ elite, he argued, this inherent need is denied the majority of citizens: ‘When, because of their remoteness, the objects acknowledged by the cultivated to be works of fine art seem anemic to the mass of people, esthetic hunger is likely to seek the cheap and the vulgar’.<sup>19</sup> To Dewey, art is a crucial human need and, by extension, a crucial social need, and should serve as both mirror and signpost to lived experience within a culture or community.

In Dewey’s view, art can play an important role in confronting socially dysfunctional conditions and strengthening ties and bonds that are crucial to communal well-being. It is the ‘means whereby the meaning of group life [is] consummated’.<sup>20</sup> The arts provide the most important means of developing a sense of community that transcends a narrow economic focus, fostering a greater connection to a principled and value-based social existence. It is also important in the development of a sense of home and place.<sup>21</sup> Dewey laments ‘the mobility of trade and of populations due to the economic system [that] has weakened or

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<sup>18</sup> Dewey, J. (1958), *Art As Experience*, Capricorn, New York, pp3-19.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p6.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p7.

<sup>21</sup> I will discuss the importance of home and place as ecological values in the next chapter.

destroyed the connection between works of art and the *genius loci* of which they were once the natural expression'.<sup>22</sup>

When art is perceived as having no intrinsic connection to the social realm, it is seen by the public as being essentially cynical. Karel Appel, lamenting such a state of affairs, once stated: 'I paint like a barbarian – in a barbaric age'<sup>23</sup>.



Figure 3.

**Karel Appel**  
*Woman with Head* 1964  
Sandstone and pigment  
Oil on canvas  
185 x 225cm

Perhaps the non-engaged stance of the artist has helped foster this alienation. The modernist dictum of art-for-art's-sake, along with the attendant separation of art from popular experience has served to establish a place for art outside the shared experience of community. As a consequence, art is seen to possess no function outside itself, with the consequential raising of questions as to art's relevance and validity in stressful and rapidly changing

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p9.

<sup>23</sup> Appel, K., *The Reality of Karel Appel*, 16mm film, John Vrijman (director), 15min colour.

Accessed on line 27/8/02

<http://www.roland-collection.com/rola>

times. Lucy Lippard, for example, refers to 'art's public image of haughty powerlessness and humiliating manipulatability'.<sup>24</sup>

Like Dewey and Lippard I hold art to be a primarily social activity; one that serves social purposes. Art is, in the view of Marxist theorist, Ernst Fischer, a necessary means whereby man [*sic*] can understand himself as part of a larger whole:

He wants to refer to something that is more than "I", something outside himself and yet essential to himself... to make his individuality social... Art is the indispensable means for this merging of the individual with the whole<sup>25</sup>.

This linking of myriad individual sensibilities constitutes a 'collective consciousness'. The potential of art to fulfil this social function is dependent upon our acceptance of the proposition that art is a way of knowing and that it operates as a virtual language – which is to say that art is a form of communication.

### **Art, Communication and Social Change**

How are values embodied in a work of art and how are these conveyed to the viewer?

Marcuse argues that 'art has its own language and illuminates reality only through this other language.'<sup>26</sup> This 'language' resides in the relationship between 'aesthetic form, autonomy and truth...each transcends the historical arena' and, from the synergy of their interrelationship, art takes on the function of

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<sup>24</sup> Lippard, L. (1984), 'Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power', in B. Wallis [ed.], *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, p345.

<sup>25</sup> Fischer, E. (1963), *The Necessity of Art: A Marxist Approach*, Penguin, Harmondsworth (Eng.), p8.

<sup>26</sup> Marcuse, H. (1978), *The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics*, Macmillan, London, p22.

'communicating truths'.<sup>27</sup> Thus 'the political potential of art lies only in its aesthetic dimension'.<sup>28</sup> Art's capacity to promote change lies in the uniquely aesthetic nature of its communication. It is an 'aesthetic language'. It 'communicates truths not communicable in any other language'.<sup>29</sup> Because, in the wider society, the discourse of the dominant interests overwhelmingly privileges what is imagined to be a value-free rationality devoid of subjectivity, this aesthetic language has an inherent subversiveness perhaps not present in other communicative modes. The language of art seems to me ideally suited to communicate ecological concerns.

But this still begs the question: What is 'an aesthetic language'? The word 'aesthetic' is from the Greek word 'aesthetikos', which means 'heightened experience' or 'feeling'. Since the eighteenth century, the term has been applied mainly to the arts, and to the visual arts in particular. 'Aesthetic', however, describes a particular level of experience that can be generated by stimuli other than of the artistic kind. Simply seeing a work of art does not of itself constitute an aesthetic experience. Rather, it is a heightened affective response that occurs as a consequence of the seeing that constitutes the aesthetic. It is also an experience that involves the transmission of knowledge. Art is a unique way of knowing, one which is derived from the artist's subjective experience and response. For the art image to be experienced subjectively by the viewer (in the case of visual art), the image has to be organised in terms of artistic form, and this involves the application of (artistic) knowledge which has essentially been acquired by objective means. Thus artistic form – the visual language of art – may be manipulated more or less objectively by the artist, but the inherent meanings communicated by artistic

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p9.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

form are grasped not only by the intellect but by the senses – via what, in a seeming paradox, Witkin has described as ‘the intelligence of feeling’.<sup>30</sup>

That artistic meaning should resonate on a subjective level, within the affective domain of knowing, does not diminish the veracity of artistic meaning as ‘truth’. By virtue of their idiosyncratic modes of representation *as* images, artistic meanings are unique, and they defy translation into other forms of knowledge: ‘Works of art are indeed artistic statements, stating truths that cannot be communicated in any other way’.<sup>31</sup> Thus, whilst a *sense* of meaning in a work of art may be experienced, the exact nature of that meaning tends, paradoxically, to defy precise verbal description, remaining enigmatic and elusive.

The impact of aesthetic experience may not be felt immediately, but rather may work a slow course through the ethical tissue that defines a person’s core being, the effects of the experience being realised at a later time, and unpredictably. I concur with the Marxist theoretician Gyorgy Lukacs’ conception of aesthetic assimilation as a process of revelation: it frees what was otherwise not amenable to change; it makes one receptive to the new. Lukacs argues that:

The aesthetic effect does influence the receiver’s practical goals and desires, but... the influence is not immediate. The aesthetic effect does not solve any of the receiver’s problems, complex or

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p10.

<sup>30</sup> Witkin, R. (1974), *The Intelligence of Feeling*, Heinemann Educational, London.

<sup>31</sup> Hirst, P. (1974), *Knowledge and the Curriculum: A Collection of Philosophical Papers*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, p153. Witkin’s concept of an ‘intelligence of feeling’ implies that artistic meaning is felt rather than coherently understood, but also that such feeling nevertheless constitutes ‘knowledge’, or a ‘sense of knowing’, or revelation. Perhaps there is an inverse relationship between the degree of ‘revelatory potential’ in an artwork and its degree of didacticism. That is, the more didactic it is, the less, perhaps, is an artwork experienced aesthetically.

simple, personal or social, but it does 'develop a human readiness'... The real power of artistic evocation is that it enlarges the receiver's picture about himself and the world in which he lives. Thus, in the total aesthetic experience there is no complete separation between life and art.<sup>32</sup>

I have argued that art is an inherently social activity, and a uniquely aesthetic form of communication, one that infers that knowledge and truth are not separate from feelings and values. If art can function as a language of social expression, it follows that it has the potential to embody and communicate values – including values *vis-à-vis* ecological issues – and even to influence change in values. Ours is often described as a highly visual culture, a view based on our familiarity and relative ease with symbols, images and other visual stimuli formed by the prolific and ubiquitous world of mass media, the internet and advertising. To what extent, however, has this visual literacy transferred to a greater appreciation of art? There is no reason, writes Lippard, 'why art should not be able to reflect social concerns of our day as naturally as novels, plays and music'.<sup>33</sup> It is the perception of such a social potential within art – and of new art media which possess popular currency – that has had a



Figure 4.

**John Glover**  
*Mills Plains* c1832-34  
Oil on canvas  
72.26 x 151.9cm  
Tasmanian Museum  
and Art Gallery, Hobart

<sup>32</sup> Kiralyfalvi, B. (1975), *The Aesthetics of Gyorgy Lukacs*, Princeton University Press, Princeton (NJ), pp121-122.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*



major impact on my own art practice.

Historically, art has played a significant role in the formation, change and maintenance of social, political, religious and ethical values. In the main, however, such values have been those of the dominant interests in any given society.

It is itself an ironic indication of acquiescence to social hegemony when it is so widely assumed that only art that is seen to *challenge* the *status quo* is that which propounds political ideas; while art whose images and forms *embody* the values and political ideas of the *status quo* is seen to be value-neutral and, in fact, quite devoid of political ideas. The seemingly benign colonial Tasmanian landscapes of John Glover (1767-1849) become sites of contention when seen in this light. *Mills Plains* (fig.4) is a typical Glover landscape-with-figures: the 'figures' being the (by-then-removed) Tasmanian Aborigines. In his critique of such works, art historian Ian McLean writes:

Glover places his Aborigines in a precolonial scene. In his paintings the Palawa become mythical antecedents cast back into an indefinite past, as if the Druids of Van Diemen's Land. Glover had a strong motive; he actually owned the land he painted and, like the English aristocracy, wanted to picture a genealogy of power and kinship, not conquest. His was a Tory view of the landscape which sought not to displace the Aborigines but to inherit their birthright.<sup>34</sup>

Whilst the latent meanings of Glover's landscapes may be seen to have served a hegemonic function, other Tasmanian landscapes have challenged this society's dominant values. More recently, Peter Dombrovskis's photography, like that of Olegas Truchanas before him, has presented an ideologically-constructed idea of wilderness that has been put to the service of the conservationist cause. His most famous photograph, *Rock Island Bend* (1983),

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<sup>34</sup> McLean, I. (1998), *White Aborigines: Identity Politics in Australian Art*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp38-39.



[fig.5] is widely acknowledged as one of the most politically potent image in recent Australian environmental history.

Martin Thomas describes the role of this single photograph in the Franklin Dam dispute thus:

The Dombrovskis image became a central icon in the campaign, emerging as one of those essential photographs that shape the face of public history. A few days before the 1983 election, with the Tasmanian dam a national issue, colour reproductions of Rock Island Bend were printed in a million newspapers, emblazoned with the caption: "Could you vote for a party that will destroy this?"... The mechanical reproduction of the photograph was pitted against the proliferation of hydro technology... the photograph won.<sup>35</sup>



Figure 5

**Peter Dombrovskis**

*Morning Mist, Rock Island Bend* (1983)

photograph on 5x4 ektrachrome E6 film  
24x 19cm

Traditionally, and notwithstanding notable historical exceptions, the artist was more likely to be a defender than a critic of existing values. Lippard, however, has maintained that there exists an inherent subversiveness within aesthetic language, arguing that 'potentially powerful art is almost by definition oppositional – that work which worms its way out of the prescribed channels and is

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas, M. (1999), 'Introduction', in M. Thomas (ed.), *Uncertain Ground: Essays Between Art + Nature*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, p10. See also Bonyhady, T. (1996), 'The Photo that Changed Us', *Weekend Australian*, 29-21 April, Features p.5; Grant, P. (2001), 'Wild Art at the World's End', *Artlink*, 21 (1), pp14-18.

seen in fresh light'.<sup>36</sup> If so, art's capacity to contribute to social change may be greater than is commonly appreciated.

## Public Art

Artists who embody the thrust of the argument set out above engage in a praxis that may be described as 'public art', an art that is characterised by its presentation in public spaces (rather than on the gallery wall), and with the intent to communicate to larger (and 'non-art') audiences. 'Public art' is a term also employed in reference to somewhat banal acts of civic beautification. Though it may not always be easy to distinguish between the two, my use of the term will refer to art and artists committed to influencing social values, as distinct from providing civic adornment.

In the remainder of this chapter I will describe the particular potentials, problems and challenges facing the practitioners of public art so defined. I will also consider the work of prominent public artists whose work has particularly inspired my own: Joseph Beuys, Shirin Neshat, Krzysztof Wodiczko, Jenny Holzer, and the Fluxus movement.<sup>37</sup> It is also the case that, like myself, many public artists work specifically with ecological themes. Some of these artists are discussed in the following chapter, when principles of public art are applied within a context of ecology, and specifically marine ecology.

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<sup>36</sup> Lippard, *op.cit.*, p345.

<sup>37</sup> There are several other artists whom I could have discussed – Barbara Kruger and Ian de Gruchy, for example – but these have been excluded for want of space.

My attraction to public art as opposed to art in the conventional exhibition format stems from a single factor: public art reaches a vastly wider audience than does gallery-constrained art, at least in Tasmania, where galleries are visited by a relatively small cohort of art enthusiasts. An art that takes upon itself a social critique function should, I believe, seek as wide an exposure as possible. Art that is confined in its impact to a small audience is obviously confined in its social impact. I agree with the Marxist commentator, Raymond Williams, who argues, in the context of literature (though his argument can be applied to creative work generally), for a 'transformation of social relations' between artist and audience. Not only must the artist be 'integrated... into public life', but there must be 'new kinds of popular, including collaborative [art]'.<sup>38</sup> The individual artists whom I consider below meet all these criteria: they deploy their art in the service of social change; they work in public spaces in order to engage with large, non-specialist audiences (though Neshat is an exception here); and they work with 'new kinds of popular art'.

There are, nevertheless, problems, not least of which is the greatly heightened personal stress that public space exhibition can impose upon the artist. The public is a more demanding clientele than the cognoscenti, being somewhat given to forcefully voiced and sweeping condemnation. The relationship between public artist and audience is an essentially interactive one, requiring the artist to step outside the normal exhibition 'comfort zone'. As the Polish projection artist, Krzysztof Wodiczko, has written:

The aim of critical public art is neither a happy self-exhibition nor a passive collaboration with the grand gallery of the city, its ideological theatre and architectural-social system. Rather, it is an engagement in strategic challenges to the city structures and mediums that mediate our everyday perception of the world; an

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<sup>38</sup> Williams, R. (1977), *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p203.

engagement through aesthetic-critical interruptions, infiltrations, and appropriations that question the symbolic, psycho-political, and economic operations of the city.<sup>39</sup>

Wodiczko also highlights the tendency to confuse 'public art' with sanitised, officially sponsored or sanctioned programs of 'art in public places'. The former critiques and confronts; the latter comforts and flatters official policy and ideology. Wodiczko writes:

I must express my critical detachment from what is generally called 'art in public places'. This bureaucratic-aesthetic form of public legitimisation may allude to the idea of public art as a social practice but in fact has little to do with it. Such a 'movement' wants to first protect the autonomy of art (bureaucratic aestheticism) as proof of its accountability. Such work functions at best as liberal urban decoration.<sup>40</sup>

There is a recurring enticement to the public artist to allow their work to be appropriated by architects and other space-shaping professionals to larger visions and schemes that are not the artist's own. Even without this lure, the temptation is to produce art that remains within certain norms of bureaucratic acceptability in order to soften the confrontational stresses that public art can generate. Such a course of action is also likely to secure access to more of the limited number of suitable public spaces for exhibition, spaces over which the artist her/himself would not normally have control.

Finally, there remains a prejudice in the mainstream art-world that public art is somehow less 'legitimate'; that it is not as 'good' if it is in the public sphere. I regard such a view as unreasonable, and a prejudice which, I believe, stems in part from the assumption that the general public is artistically less discerning than the more critically sophisticated clientele of a gallery.

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<sup>39</sup> Wodiczko, K. (1999), *Critical Vehicles: Writings, Projects, Interviews*, MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass.), p27.

The Marxist theoretician, Walter Benjamin, argues that politically motivated work is only truly successful if it also satisfies the criteria of aesthetic merit. Benjamin has written of literature:

a work of literature can be politically correct only if it is also correct in the literary sense. That means that the tendency which is politically correct includes a literary tendency... this literary tendency... makes up the quality of a work. It is because of this that the correct political tendency of a work extends also to its literary quality.<sup>41</sup>

Transposing Benjamin's argument into an art context would mean that socially focused art only qualifies as 'art' if it meets the criteria of aesthetic merit. If it fails to meet such standards the work not only fails as art but fails in its political intent. Socially-focused art, then, must satisfy accepted criteria of aesthetic merit, whilst at the same time succeeding in other ways. In particular, perhaps, it must effectively communicate with non-specialist audiences.

Turning to the 'prominent public artists' listed above, I will start with Joseph Beuys and the Fluxus movement, in acknowledgement of their historical importance in the development of the theory and practice of public art. Fluxus generally – and Beuys in particular – are important to me because of the ecological dimensions of their work, but I am here concerned principally with their status as early practitioners and communicators of the principles and values of public art.

It is difficult to satisfactorily define Fluxus as an artistic movement. David T. Doris describes it as a multidisciplinary or inter-media movement of disparate artists and art commentators of the early 1960s. 'Fluxus was a group of nominally kindred spirits who together and separately surveyed the peripheral

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<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

territories of their respective disciplines', Doris writes. 'The new structures that resulted from these explorations tested received notions of the limits of the arts'.<sup>42</sup> As Simon Shaw-Miller notes, 'Fluxus was concerned with the ground between media, that which they already have in common, the locus of flux'.<sup>43</sup> Fluxus placed particular emphasis upon inter-media performance, termed 'Actions', in which it sought to replicate the flux of nature within artistic flux, advocating a low-tech aesthetic.<sup>44</sup> The relevance of the Fluxus movement to my practice lies in its non-conformist approach to artistic communication, an approach which, when combined with the scale of the inter-media 'Actions' that the Fluxus artists staged, inevitably took it into the public domain.

Joseph Beuys was, for a time, prominent within Fluxus. He was attracted to the conception of Fluxus as 'the applied arts'<sup>45</sup>, though he was never completely at home in the movement.<sup>46</sup> Beuys was impatient with the view of art as a human activity that could be confined within a labelled box. Klaus Staeck has written that 'probably no-one else has ever lived the oneness of art and life so convincingly as Beuys... he constantly challenged the restricted traditional view of art'.<sup>47</sup> Staeck describes Beuys as 'one of the few artists to achieve worldwide celebrity without ever having fixed links with the gallery'.<sup>48</sup> Beuys deemed it necessary to move beyond the gallery because his art was

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<sup>41</sup> Benjamin, W. (1977), *Understanding Brecht*, NLB, London, p86.

<sup>42</sup> Doris, D.T. (1998), 'Zen Vaudeville: A Medi(t)ation in the Margins of Fluxus' in K. Freidman (ed.), *The Fluxus Reader*, Academy Editions, Chichester (Eng.), pp91-135.

<sup>43</sup> Shaw-Miller, S. (1996), "'Concerts of Everyday Living": Cage, Fluxus and Barthes, Interdisciplinarity and Inter-media Events', *Art History*, Vol.19, p3.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> Stachelhaus, H. (1987), *Joseph Beuys*, Abbeville, New York, p128.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, pp129, 132.

<sup>47</sup> Staeck, K. (1986), "'Democracy is Fun'", in T. Nevill (trans.), *Joseph Beuys: In Memory Joseph Beuys. Obituaries. Essays, Speeches*, Inter Nationes, Bonn, p12.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

conjoined to social goals that were intensely political and needed to confront all of society. Staock argues that the essence of Beuys' project was deliberately played down by critics:

Nothing... got Beuys more worked up than any attempt at separating his works and the accompanying political intentions. The usual approach was to praise the earlier drawings but try to forget Beuys' involvement in the environmental and peace movement. He constantly kept an eye on what the powerful were up to... He knew that harmless gestures were not enough for countering the catastrophes that threaten.<sup>49</sup>



Figure 6

Joseph Beuys

7,000 Oaks (1982)

Photograph taken of the first planted oak on the Friedrichsplatz in Kassel, documenta 7, 1982 by Ute Klophaus

In order to realise his commitment to a public and intensely political artistic project, Beuys was determined to liberate art from the gallery, in his view a 'prison house' to which it had been confined. [fig.6] This categorisation of the gallery as incompatible with a socially-focussed art has most attracted me to Beuys' art and his art theories. For Beuys the definition of art is an extended one:

beyond the specialist activity carried out by artists to the active mobilisation of every individual's latent creativity, and then,

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, pl4.

following on from that, the moulding of the society of the future based on the total energy of this individual creativity. In other words: of the people by the people for the people.<sup>50</sup>

Fluxus generally, and Beuys in particular, pioneered a vigorous worldwide movement of political public art. The three artists whose work I discuss below are prominent exemplars of what can be achieved within this artistic paradigm. Their art has an added significance for me in that all three have worked extensively with projection, the art medium to which I have increasingly been drawn.

Krzysztof Wodiczko, a Polish artist now living in North America, expresses my own sentiments about the nature of the public arena as artistic space. Through his writing and public art projections, Wodiczko brings communal space to the attention of the public as a site where social issues can be mediated through art. Wodiczko's projected images transform the façades of buildings and monuments. They draw attention to such issues as homelessness, displacement and community identity.<sup>51</sup> Though the projections in his art 'events' are ephemeral – and this is one of the reasons why I find his work so interesting – Wodiczko incorporates images of, and commentary upon his work in books, which he conceives as vehicles for conveying his ideas and views – and to 'inspire new visions, counterpoints and actions'. A Wodiczko book is, in his own words, 'an ongoing written

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<sup>50</sup> Tisdall, C. (1980), *Joseph Beuys: Coyote*, Schirmer/Mosel, Munich, p22.

<sup>51</sup> An Australian artist working a similar seam to Wodiczko, and whose work I much admire, is Ian de Gruchy. Sometimes at the head of a collaborative team, he achieves an impressive sense of fluid movement through manipulations of still images. By using computer generation to build an artwork from the ground up, through precise timing and the use of slow dissolves and seamless animation (even when using still projection), and through the finesse and dexterity with which he deploys his equipment, de Gruchy effectively transforms the space with which he works. His own place is central to his work, and I like the ecological resonances of such a focus.



invitation for readers to become critical “reagents”... sustaining in this way a cultural chain reaction in our democratic laboratory’.<sup>52</sup>

Wodiczko favourably contrasts a public art praxis over one geared to gallery institutions, and for similar reasons to my own: that art functions in fundamentally different ways within public spaces than it does in galleries, and that, as a consequence, it generates different audience dynamics:

I am not dismissing museums or art galleries as ‘public’ spaces but the difference is that in those public spaces, of art institutions, the public acts differently. It is intimidated somehow; it’s confined; it’s inside those institutions. Therefore, social relations of reception in institutional interiors are very different than those on the street.<sup>53</sup>

But it is Wodiczko’s views on the nature of public space and the way that such space can be claimed for political contest that I find most compelling.

Images in public art need to be arresting, because they have to compete for audience attention. Passers-by do not constitute an *actual* but rather a *potential* audience. They must be motivated to move from the role of pedestrian to that of engaged art viewer. The power of Wodiczko’s images largely derives from their directness and simplicity. This observation has led me to consider my own images in similar terms.

Wodiczko’s projections are loaded with cultural references and suggest meanings of which some, such as the loaded gun in his projection on to the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington DC, are obvious. [fig.7] Others are more elusive.

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<sup>52</sup> Wodiczko, *op.cit.*, p.xvii.

<sup>53</sup> Wodiczko, K. (1987), ‘An Interview by Ian Smith-Rubenzahl’, *C Magazine*, Vol.12, p60.



Figure 7.

Krzysztof Wodiczko  
 Ontario Horn Museum,  
 Washington DC  
 Projection  
<http://www.art-for-change.com/>  
 Krzysztof Krzyttm

The point that provides cognitive entry into the work is often an obvious reference to a controversial event within the current political situation, whilst the more elusive references invite questioning on other grounds. The transformation of the buildings into representations of the human image is, I think, an attempt to humanise spaces that have been bureaucratically created, that are deliberately impersonal and even intentionally depersonalised. Wodiczko's project is to reclaim dehumanised space for people, but not in any 'feelgood' way. Wodiczko seeks to remind people that human space is a site of contestation.

Shirin Neshat also works with projected image, though in a somewhat more conventionally filmic way than Wodiczko. Neshat's film installations take the form of politically charged short films. She lives and works in the United States, but was born and raised in Iran, and it is the lot of women in her native Iran that provides the political impetus for her art. At the same time, Neshat seeks to deal with her physical alienation from her native culture and from the political struggles there. As Lynn Herbert notes: 'Neshat dealt with her sense of displacement by

trying to untangle the ideology of Islam through art'<sup>54</sup>, whilst Amei Wallach observes: 'Shirin Neshat has produced a series of stark, visually arresting films that reflect the tensions of Muslim society and her own conflicted role as an Iranian woman living in the West.'<sup>55</sup>



Figure 8.

Shirin Neshat  
*Speechless*, (1996)  
 B&W RC print and ink  
 Photographer Barry Larns

Neshat uses black-and-white film to counterpoint the black chador that is the prescribed dress for women within fundamentalist Iranian Islam. As Wallach notes:

She was struck by the sight of the women in the head-to-toe chador that had become the required attire in the wake of the revolution and had literally changed the landscape... It has become a kind of prison uniform, denying sexuality and individuality.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Herbert, L.M., 'Shirin Neshat: Rapture 1999', Contemporary Arts Museum, New York, Accessed online 2/5/02

<http://www.time.com/time/europe/photoessays/neshat/>

<sup>55</sup> Wallach, A. (2001), 'Shirin Neshat: Islamic Counterpoints', *Art in America*, October, p137.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* Neshat recounts these experiences first hand in an interview with Lina Bertucci (1997), 'Shirin Neshat: Eastern Values', *Flash Art*, vol.30 (no. 197), pp84-87.

Neshat makes stark use of images of chador-clothed women. In her work the dress becomes a symbol of repression and a metaphor for the tension between Islamic culture and the West, between men and women, and between freedom and repression. Writing of her film installation, *Rapture* (1999), Herbert notes especially the male/female tension, and gives it a quasi-ecological context:

The men move in an ordered authoritarian environment, the fortress, a seemingly indomitable architectural element imposed upon the landscape. The veiled women, on the other hand, inhabit the unforgiving wilds of nature, subject to its whims and hardships. Yet the fortress is a ruin, outdated and irrelevant.<sup>57</sup>

Such tension is emphasised by her use of the dual screen, which ‘structurally separates the male and female characters’<sup>58</sup>, and which, as a strategy, forces the viewer to make a conscious effort to disengage from one form of cultural activity and re-engage visually with the activities depicted in the other. The viewer is forced to be an ‘interactive’ participant within a visual conversation – to examine situations from different perspectives. As Herbert puts it, ‘Neshat’s realm is one that both perpetuates and challenges our myriad assumptions and associations’.<sup>59</sup>

I viewed Shirin Neshat’s production, *Rapture* (1999), in London and again in Sydney, and on both occasions found it an extraordinarily moving experience. [fig.9] The viewer becomes a participant immediately upon entering the dim space with its dual screens, each set on an opposite wall to the other, and on which 125 men and 125 women are juxtaposed. The men, in black trousers and white shirts, walk through an old and crumbling fortress. The women, chador-clad, move slowly and with dignity

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<sup>57</sup> Herbert, *op.cit.*

<sup>58</sup> Ryan, O. (2000), ‘Whitney’, *Circa* (Ireland), no 92, p57. On Neshat’s use of the dual screen in her video installation *Turbulent* (1998) see Miller, P.D. (1998), *Parkett*, no.54, pp. 157-159.

<sup>59</sup> Herbert, *op.cit.*

through a turbulent desert. Eventually the two groups confront each other in a frozen silence, before the women continue across the desert to an emerging coastline, where six of them sail away in a boat. The men, however, return to their pointless rituals within the fortress, stirring only occasionally to take note of the progress of the women.



Figure 9.

Shirin Neshat  
Stills from *Rapture* (1999)  
16mm film transferred to DVD,  
shown on 2 facing screens,  
13 minute loop

*Rapture* made a great impression upon me, not purely in a visual sense, though the piece resonated powerfully with its black-and-white starkness and its minimalist approach. The most profound impact of *Rapture*, however, was effected by its power as a political statement.

Neshat's project, along with those of the other artists discussed in this section, intersect my own. *Rapture* makes use of similar devices to those which I have employed in my own art. I have made extensive use of dual projection, though for different reasons, such as the capacity of this device to extend the visual range. Neshat also makes considerable use of gut-wrenching primal sound and music, a potent and unnerving component within her installations that gives the work great emotional

power. Since viewing her work I have been inspired to make greater use of sound in my own installations. Though less evident in *Rapture*, Neshat also makes effective use of calligraphic text derived from the work of dissident Iranian poets, and I have also explored the considerable potential that resides within text and with collaboration with literary artists.

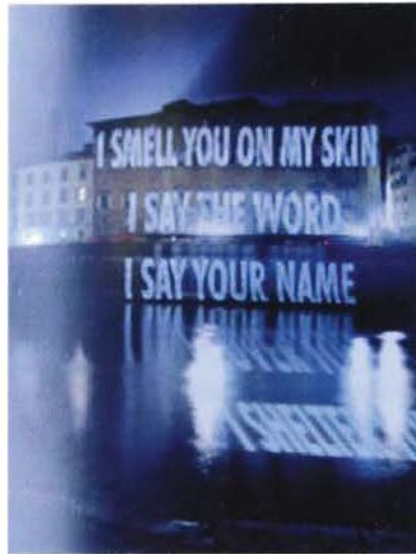


figure 10

**Jenny Holzer**  
From *Arno* (1967-97)  
18.5mm Kodachrome film  
Xenon projection  
Dimensions variable Project,  
Arno River,  
'Biennale de Firenze il tempo e la Moda',  
Florence, 1996

The final artist whom I consider, Jenny Holzer, also uses calligraphic inscriptions and the written word. However, it is not as much the use of text that interests me about Holzer's work, as her more recent projection-based art as a totality. In this later work, Holzer continues to make use of text, but the shift to projection seems to have added depth and piquancy to the pithy, quotable and confrontational epithets that she employs. Like Neshat, Holzer seeks to change the ways by which people construct their place in, and view of the world. She seeks 'the

dematerialization of experience as a tool to heighten awareness of our human physicality and psychology'.<sup>60</sup> But the use of projection in Holzer's work, particularly when a reflective element is incorporated (as in *Arno* [1996-97]), adds capacities for visual poetry that, I believe, her earlier billboard text did not achieve. This comparison between Holzer's earlier and later work – and the greater impact realised in the latter through projection – has provided me with a considerably heightened appreciation of the artistic scope and possibility that projection offers.

In the next chapter, I develop a case for ecological concerns assuming greater significance within art practice in the years ahead, drawing particularly on Gablik's 1992 book, *The Reenchantment of Art*, in which she puts a compelling case for an art of social involvement in defence of ecological causes.

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<sup>60</sup> Brown, K., and Salvatore, N. (1999), 'Trends in Computer and Technological Art', *Art Criticism*, vol.14, p99.

## CHAPTER 3

### Ecological Principles for Art Practice

In Chapter 2, I examined influences from art theory and practice that have helped shape my own work. In this chapter I consider a number of ecological thinkers who have been crucial to the construction of my thought on ecological crisis and on the nature of an environmental commitment. It is not possible to understand my conception of what constitutes 'ecological art' without an understanding of what is involved in the 'ecological' part of the equation.

In *The Reenchantment of Art*, Suzi Gablik develops her theories within a specifically ecological context. 'The task of restoring awareness of our symbiotic relationship with nature', she writes, has become 'the most pressing *and* political need of our time'.<sup>1</sup> Gablik is critical of the position, adopted by certain postmodernist social critics, that we lack as a society 'any great integrating vision or project'. Gablik insists that 'the great collective project has, in fact, presented itself. It is that of saving the earth – at this point, nothing else really matters'.<sup>2</sup> Gablik here constructs a case for the priority of ecologically motivated action over all other social priorities. She also claims for 'ecology' the status of a unifying foundation for the social reconstruction that the times require. Ecology is thus 'a new cultural force we can no longer escape – it is the only effective challenge to the long-term priorities of the present economic order'.<sup>3</sup> Her project, it seems to me, is to give artists the courage to claim an ecological mantle for

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<sup>1</sup> Gablik, S. (1991), *The Reenchantment of Art*, Thames and Hudson, New York, p77.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p26.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p27.



their work, against the predominant critical and ideological sanctioning of self-referential art.<sup>4</sup>

Two specific aspects of Gablik's thought warrant consideration here. One of these – her discussion of developments in theoretical science – I will postpone until later in the chapter. The other is signposted by *The Reenchantment of Art's* Chapter 6 title: 'The Ecological Imperative'. In expanding this 'imperative' Gablik critiques patriarchal western societies in particular, and advocates an orientation toward a fundamental concern for the earth, a concern which, in patriarchal western societies, is tragically lacking:

Modern individuals do not see the earth as a source of spiritual renewal – they see it as a stockpile of raw materials to be exploited and consumed... We are bred from birth to live on the earth as consumers, and this exploitative form of perception now determines all our social, economic and political relationships, in a style that knows no limits... In modern times, the basic metaphor of the human presence on the earth is the bulldozer. Our dealings with the earth in the last two centuries have been guided less and less by moral or ecological considerations and more and more by short term utility and greed. We are the most expensive of the community of nature.<sup>5</sup>

Against this 'de-natured' standpoint, Gablik argues for an ethic of 'relatedness' in which 'community', both human and biological, is rescued from the grip of amoral capitalist individualism. Her 'ecological imperative' is similar to the notion of an 'ecological impulse', as advanced by the Australian scholar, Peter Hay. Hay cites a number of people who articulate the view that:

The wellsprings of a green commitment - at both the activist and more passive levels of identification - are not, in the first instance, theoretical; nor even intellectual. They are, rather, pre-rational. Though such a commitment may be subsequently justified via recourse to an intellectually generated system of

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<sup>4</sup> This is a concern that has also been well articulated by the Australian artist Simeon Nelson: 'much of contemporary visual art [is] too focused on semantics and not enough with broader issues' (Nelson, S. [1997], 'Comment', in *Australian Perspectives 1997: Between Art and Nature*, Exhibition Catalogue, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, p11).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp77-78.

ideas, most people come to a position of green identification in the first instance via some trigger or impulse.<sup>6</sup>

For Hay that trigger is an instinctual horror at the scale of the undeclared war being waged by our species on other forms of life. I am in accord with Hay's response. As I have explained in Chapter 1, my witnessing the deterioration of the network of life beneath the waters of Tasmania's Mercury Passage has been a key influence upon my own politics and art. However, as I have also indicated, there is possibly more to this than Hay acknowledges. What is missing from Hay's explanation is any sense of the wonder evoked by close contact with the natural world. Apart from horror at what is being lost, a deep ecological empathy stems from more positive feelings of awe and reverence inspired by the majesty of life in all its complexity and beauty. This is an empathy founded upon aesthetic experience which, in terms of an ecologically-motivated art, would seem the most appropriate basis for action. Thus I believe that Gablik's notion of an ecological imperative, with its incorporation of inspired sensation – the awe, spirit and non-rational dimensions of ecological attachment – has the most profound artistic and philosophical implications for an ecological art.

In order to understand the aesthetic experience of space, I have turned to the work of the mid-twentieth century German philosopher, Martin Heidegger. Writing within the phenomenological tradition, Heidegger takes the spiritual view that space is 'full with meaning'<sup>7</sup>, at which point it ceases to be merely amorphous space and becomes place. Thus for Heidegger space can be experienced directly, without the mediation of rational processes. In fact, Hay argues that Heidegger:

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<sup>6</sup> Hay, P. (2002), *Main Currents in Western Environmental Thought*. University of New South Wales Press, Sydney, p2.

<sup>7</sup> Relph, E. (1976), *Place and Placelessness*, Pion, London, p18.

wanted the nature of 'being' to be recognised as the central question of philosophy, specifically a non-abstract conception of being as things in their particularity, their 'realness'. For Heidegger the question of being is... a question of how we 'dwell'.<sup>8</sup>

In arguing for 'being' and 'dwelling' as the central concerns for philosophy, Heidegger pronounced against abstraction, conceptualisation and reason as the essential philosophical processes. He instead argued for processes that seem to have more in common with art and other creative endeavour than with the rational case-construction that is usually considered the province of philosophy. 'To Heidegger', William Lovitt has argued, 'true thinking always remains a revealing', and one 'must follow where that revealing leads'.<sup>9</sup>

The relevance of this to art has been well described by Heidegger himself: 'The art work opens up in its own way the Being of beings. This opening up, i.e., this disconcealing, i.e., the truth of beings, happens in the work. Art is truth setting itself to work'.<sup>10</sup> This strongly implies that an artwork must remain engaged with the world. Julian Young has written of Heidegger that an artwork 'can lose its greatness through "world withdrawal"'. It then becomes a 'museum piece'<sup>11</sup>, what Heidegger calls 'the realm of tradition and conservation'.<sup>12</sup>

And the relevance of this to ecology lies in Heidegger's notion of 'sparing'. A place of dwelling is a space which is a 'field of care'. The Heideggerian phenomenologist, Edward Relph, has written: 'Sparing is a willingness to leave places alone and not to change

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<sup>8</sup> *Op.cit.*, pp159-160.

<sup>9</sup> Lovitt, W., (1977), 'Introduction', in M.Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, Harper & Row, New York, pxxxviii.

<sup>10</sup> Heidegger, M. (1971), *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harper & Row, New York, p39.

<sup>11</sup> Young, J. (2001), *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, p19.

them casually or arbitrarily, and not to exploit them'.<sup>13</sup> This sounds quite passive, but Hay argues that Heidegger's notion of sparing in fact entails responsibilities of activism:

...it extends beyond a passive commitment to personally spare, to actively resist the vandalism others would inflict upon one's home. A 'field of care', in other words, entails a steward's duty of protection. To sit passively by and acquiesce in the destruction of one's home is to fail one's duty to take all steps possible to 'care' for one's dwelling.<sup>14</sup>

Here we can realise a convergence of Hay's essentially defensive 'ecological impulse' and Gablik's more versatile and positive notion of an 'ecological imperative'. This convergence, or synthesis, is epitomised in the wilderness photography of Peter Dombrovskis.

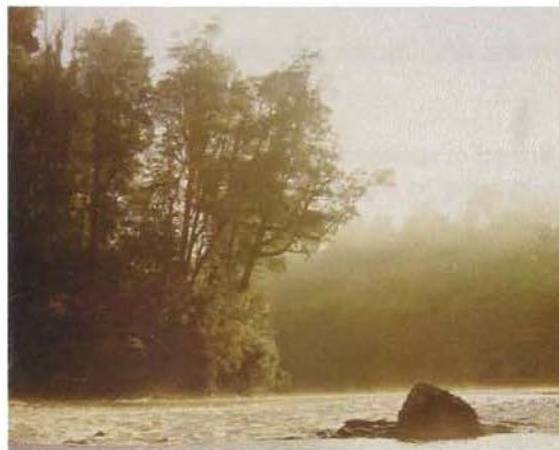


Figure 11

Peter Dombrovskis

*Lower Franklin Below Jane River* (1983)

photograph on 5x4 ektrachrome E6 film

21 x 17cm

As described by Martin Thomas, 'the *wilderness* photograph is decidedly embattled. Its waxen similitude sounds a warning that eventually the image is all we will have. Nature... has dwindled to become an endangered species, a rare marsupial mouse'.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Heidegger (1971), *op.cit.*, p41.

<sup>13</sup> *Op.cit.*, p39.

<sup>14</sup> *Op.cit.*, p161.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas, M. (1999), 'Introduction', in M.Thomas (ed.), *Uncertain Ground: Essays Between Art + Nature*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, p10.

Thus the space of which we are so in awe becomes a place we want to protect, the ‘embattled nature’ of Dombrovskis. Nature is ‘an endangered species’, and the sublime meets Hay’s biodiversity-based ‘ecological impulse’.

An explicitly ecological phenomenologist is the American philosopher David Abram. For Abram, ‘the recuperation of the incarnate, sensorial dimension of experience brings with it a recuperation of the living landscape in which we are corporeally embedded’.<sup>16</sup> Abram here establishes an inextricable link between experience, perception and sensation and an ecological groundedness that resonates with the ideas of Hay and Gablik discussed above. Through our senses – explicitly *not* through the reasoning processes of the brain – we establish the requisite sense of belonging to a larger ecological whole. ‘As we return to our senses’, Abram writes:

we gradually discover our sensory perceptions to be simply our part of a vast, interpenetrating webwork of perceptions and sensations born by countless other bodies – supported, that is, not just by ourselves, but by icy streams tumbling down granitic slopes, by owl wings and lichens, and by the unseen imperturbable wind.<sup>17</sup>

From Abram’s ecologically derived phenomenology, a perspective on art is alluded to, one implicitly communicated by Abram: ‘Genuine art we might say, is simply human creation that does not stifle the nonhuman element... Genuine artistry, in this sense, does not impose a wholly external form upon some ostensibly “inert” matter’.<sup>18</sup> There are two other aspects of Abram’s thought that have made a particular impression upon me. One of these is his discussion of language; the other is his consideration of the native American peoples’ way of being.

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<sup>16</sup> Abram, D. (1996), *The Spell of the Sensuous*, Random House, New York, p65.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p278.

Abram devotes much of his book to a consideration of language. Again, as a phenomenologist, he is concerned with how the essences of 'things' are disclosed, or unfold. By 'language' Abram refers to the means by which a phenomenon expresses *itself*. This is a view of language that is slightly different from, but commensurate with, the notion of art as an immediate, sub-rational language. He describes the same primal response that pertains to visual art, but he envisions the response as coming from both directions. Thus he argues that language is 'physically and sensorially resonant' and 'it can never be definitely separated from the evident expressiveness of birdsong'.<sup>19</sup> This is an extremely 'ecological' way of viewing language, one in which all communicating parties participate: '...in the untamed world of direct sensory experience *no* phenomenon presents itself as utterly passive or inert. To the sensing body all phenomena are animate'.<sup>20</sup>

Abram discusses, at length, indigenous relationships with the land. His landscapes are 'storied', after the indigenous fashion. Naming something is not undertaken in order to provide an individual identity, but to locate a feature or a creature within a larger totality. The chief characteristic of this landscape is its interconnectedness. A storied landscape is inevitably one full of relationality. It is also a landscape in which the presence of the sacred becomes manifest. Abram writes of the loss of story in landscape:

This double retreat, of the senses and of spoken stories, from the diverse places that had once gripped them, cleared the way for the notion of a pure and featureless 'space' – an abstract conception that has nevertheless come to seem, today, more primordial and 'real' than the earthly places in which we remain corporeally embedded.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p80.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p81.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p185.

Again we have the phenomenological engagement of the total senses. Abram argues that ‘it is only when a culture shifts its participation to these printed letters [of writing] that the stones fall silent. Only as our senses transfer their animating magic to the written word do the trees become mute, the other animals dumb.’<sup>22</sup>

Abram also argues that ‘to fully engage, sensorially, with one’s earthly surroundings is to find oneself in a world of cycles’.<sup>23</sup> Abram’s concern with biophysical cycles relates ecological ideas to older paradigms of science. The work of Abram points simultaneously in three directions – to science, to philosophy and to the realm of spirit.

In the following, I present the ideas of individuals who are representative of each of these three interlinked domains, and who have made an impact on my own ecological thought. I say ‘interlinked’ because each has gone to considerable lengths to transcend distinctions between science, philosophy and spirit respectively.

For my ideas on the need for science to be recast within a framework of ecological assumptions, I have been strongly influenced by the American theoretical physicist and Director of the Centre for Ecoliteracy in Berkeley, California, Fritjof Capra. Capra is critical of the key axioms of mainstream science as formulated in the seventeenth century by the French philosopher Rene Descartes. For Descartes the human species is fundamentally separate from the rest of creation. Furthermore, the rational part of the human brain is fundamentally separate from the rest of the human body. Only the rational brain, according to Descartes’ theory, is endowed with value,

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p131.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p186.

subjectivity and soul. The rest is mere gross matter, value-free, and available for unconstrained human manipulation. Thus the Cartesian view recognises the universe as a mechanistic system, composed of elementary building blocks, rather than as ecological and composed primarily of relationships. The stark division between mind and body, human and bestial, is what constitutes Cartesian dualism. In this conception – the dominant, prevailing view which has underpinned the philosophy of western science – opposites are paired, but are not in a yin-yang relationship of balance. In the Cartesian model, one half of each dualism is established as superior to the other: rational over intuitive, man over nature, subject over object. Such a view of the inherent superiority of thought over feeling, human over beast, and subject over object has licensed the manipulation of whole ecologies in the interests of the material advancement of one privileged species:

...inner fragmentation mirrors our view of our view of the world 'outside' which is seen as a multitude of separate objects and events. The natural environment is treated as if it consisted of separate parts to be exploited by different interest groups. The fragmented view is further extended to society... The belief that all these fragments – in ourselves, in our environment and in our society – are really separate can be seen as the essential reason for the present series of social, ecological and cultural crises. It has alienated us from nature and from our fellow human beings.<sup>24</sup>

Capra draws parallels between the principles of flow and process to be found within eastern religions and the principles of flux and interconnectedness to be found within the new scientific paradigms of ecology and quantum physics. It is a movement from 'event thinking' to 'systems thinking'. Capra argues that fundamentally different ethical and social norms stem from such a radically reconstituted science. The new ecological paradigm urges a critical reassessment by people in all spheres of life of the

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<sup>24</sup> Capra, F. (1992), *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism*, Flamingo, London, p28.



principles underlying current assumptions, priorities and values. But this is a process that extends beyond the purely rational brain, identifying cognition as ‘the full process of life – including perceptions, emotions and behaviours’.<sup>25</sup> We need, with all our being, to become what Capra calls ‘ecoliterate’, by which he means ‘understanding the principles of organisation of ecological communities (ie. ecosystems) and using those principles for creating sustainable human communities’.<sup>26</sup> It is what Capra, in common with much of the related literature, calls a paradigm shift<sup>27</sup>. Such a paradigm shift requires first and foremost a differently-based science.

The systems view that Capra advocates, with its stress upon interconnectedness, fits my view of ecological art, particularly in its cross-disciplinary and collaborative aspects. To simply select and ‘take’ content for an artwork from subject matter of an ecological kind does not of itself make one an ecological artist. To view problems and projects ecologically is to work across boundaries, to involve oneself in synergistic relationships – to make connections with other artists and other perspectives and other energies. ‘Ecological art’, then, is as much about artistic process as artistic outcomes. This is not to say, however, that outcomes are irrelevant. Christo and Jeanne-Claude, for example, work across boundaries, and in collaborative projects. I do not disapprove of such methods, but their intentions are questionable from an ecological perspective, as are their final products. Christo and Jeannne-Claude’s ‘environmental art’ simply leaves what, in my opinion, is an unacceptably large ‘footprint’. His methodology may be described as ‘ecological’,

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<sup>25</sup> Capra, F. (1996), *The Web of Life: A New Synthesis of Mind and Matter*, Flamingo, London, p278.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p289.

<sup>27</sup> Capra draws upon Thomas Kuhn’s theory of ‘paradigm shifts’ in science. A paradigm shift in scientific views often reflects a cultural shift and a particular vision of reality that is the ‘basis of the way the community organises itself’ (*ibid.*, p5).

but his themes and his outcomes are not: the landscape is merely conceived as a stage upon which to act. I will return to the distinction between environmental art and my own conception of ecological art in the next chapter.

Moving from science to philosophy, and in particular, to ecologically informed ethics, my main influences have been the 'deep ecologists', Arne Naess and Warwick Fox. Here too, the Cartesian legacy of man/nature dualism<sup>28</sup> is a key target for criticism. In one of the most influential early works of ecophilosophy, Lynn White jnr. wrote: 'What we do about ecology depends on our ideas on the man-nature relationship'. As long as this concept of dualism remains within us, 'we will not be able to make these fundamental changes in our attitudes and actions affecting ecology'.<sup>29</sup> The phrase 'deep ecology' was coined in 1973 when the Norwegian philosopher, Arne Naess, published his paper, 'The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement: A Summary'. The defining characteristics of Naess' 'Summary' are:

- (1) The well-being and flourishing of both human and non-human life on earth represent values in themselves.
- (2) Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are also values in themselves.
- (3) Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital needs.<sup>30</sup>

There is also a procedural aspect to deep ecology. For Naess, deep ecology is 'predicated on asking deeper and deeper

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<sup>28</sup> Describing the mass of humanity as 'man' inherently provides another Cartesian dualistic construct: namely 'man/woman'.

<sup>29</sup> White, L. (1967), 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis', *Science*, vol.155, p1206.

<sup>30</sup> Naess, A. (1993), 'The Deep Ecological Movement: Some Philosophical Aspects', in M. E. Zimmerman, J.B. Callicott, G. Sessions, K.J. Warren and J. Clark (eds.), *Environmental Philosophy*:

questions about the ecological relationships of which we are a part'<sup>31</sup>. As the Australian deep ecologist, Warwick Fox, notes:

...this approach attempts to foster a greater awareness of the intimate and manifold relationships that exist between what we conventionally designate as *self* and what we conventionally designate as *environment*. It attempts, in other words, to foster the development of an *ecological* rather than *environmental* consciousness.<sup>32</sup>

I was introduced to the historically important role of Naess through reading Fox's 1990 book, *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology*. For Fox the central idea of deep ecology is 'Self-realization!' [his emphasis]. This is a concept which Hay defines as 'the construction of as wide a sense of self as possible through a process of identifying out and including an enlarged scope of life and living process within one's sense of (S)self'.<sup>33</sup> I understand this to mean that a distinction is made in deep ecology between the personal self and the 'capital-S' Self, which is formed by taking on, as part of oneself, all that with which one identifies. As Hay states:

There is nothing mystical about this notion: the commonsense definition is the one that prevails. One extends the perception of self by identifying the interests of entities with which one experiences a sense of commonality as one's own interests'.<sup>34</sup>

More recently Fox has argued for the replacement of the term 'deep ecology' by 'transpersonal ecology' to refer to the ecophilosophical approach that goes beyond 'one's own egoic, biographical, or personal sense of self'.<sup>35</sup> Within Fox's concept one has the same responsibilities to defend and care for that wider ecological Self as one has for one's own bodily self. Perhaps the change of name may not mean significant change in practice.

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from *Animal Rights to Radical Ecology*, Prentice-Hall, Englewood Cliffs (NJ), p197.

<sup>31</sup> Fox, W. (1990), *Toward a Transpersonal Ecology: Developing New Foundations for Environmentalism*, Shambhala, Boston (Mass.), p92.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p8.

<sup>33</sup> Hay, *op.cit.*, p47.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, pp47-48.

<sup>35</sup> Fox, *op.cit.*, p190.

What is important, however, is that such a concept, and its attendant label, may form a stronger foundation for an ecological ethics.

The value system espoused by Fox challenges our value priorities. It underpins my own philosophy in its recognition of the importance of the relationships between each one of us and the environment. This 'deeply' ecological way of thinking again emphasises the importance of interconnectedness and ecological relationship that is central to my own practice. However, in that it brings the ecological dimension back into the self, albeit a 'Self' expanded beyond the confines of the body, this axiom of interconnectedness also links ecology back to the act of individual creativity that is, in turn, central to the processes of art.

Having referred back to the three interlinked domains to which Abram's work points, I come to the realm of the spirit. Here the two ecological thinkers who have been particularly influential are La Trobe University's Director of the Centre for Archetypal Studies, the Jungian theologian, David Tacey and the American spiritual ecofeminist, Charlene Spretnak.

Tacey argues that a profound spiritual change in Australian consciousness is needed if we are to develop an ecologically sustainable way of living in this land. We need 'a spiritual revolution in Euro-Australian consciousness'. We are 'spiritually bereft, but the way ahead may not be by means of a return to archaic animism... We must change our consciousness from within... [to] create an answering image to Aboriginal spirituality.'<sup>36</sup> Tacey is arguing here for a transformation in European consciousness that will be substantially influenced by the Aboriginal Dreaming in which 'landscape is a living field of

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<sup>36</sup> Tacey, D. (1995), *Edge of the Sacred: Transformation in Australia*, HarperCollins, Blackburn (Vic.), pp133-134.

spirits and metaphysical forces',<sup>37</sup> but which is not merely an appropriation of indigenous spirituality. He considers that 'we need to develop not pre-modern mysticism but rather a postmodern spirituality, one that meets the demands of the present in ways that are entirely in accordance with our own advanced, technological, scientific and intellectual development'<sup>38</sup>. For Tacey the western tradition stands in need of a re-enchantment<sup>39</sup> 'inspired by nature and the archetypal feminine'<sup>40</sup>, because 'the ecological crisis is at bottom a psychological and spiritual crisis'.<sup>41</sup>

I agree that it is imperative for Australians to 'develop a full and vital mythic awareness' so that we may establish 'a deeper spiritual pact with the land'<sup>42</sup> as a prerequisite for learning to live sustainably, and also that we should take our lead in the generation of such a spirituality from indigenous Australia. Tacey forcefully argues that such a process will not primarily be rationally driven, but will come from the immediate and non-reflective impulses that underlie the production of art. I contend that art is almost inherently spiritual, in that it seeks to generate significant affective response within those who encounter it. In Aboriginal art there exist no boundaries between place, the Dreaming and the practice of art. For instance, in a painting of Nicole Newley, *Example Of Living* (2001), [fig.12] themes of the ocean are inextricably bound up in evocations of her own identity and culture.

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p 139.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p150.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p203.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p151.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.



Figure 12

Nicole Newley b 1967  
*Example of Living* (2001)  
 Oil on canvas  
 100 x 68cm

Charlene Spretnak's project is to critique – and reject – the modernist, postmodernist and romantic paradigms. None of these paradigms, she argues, is appropriate to the ecological and human needs of our time. Although 'the Romantics addressed many conditions that are still with us today'<sup>43</sup>, Spretnak sees them as simply one of the 'ecospiritual' movements 'resisting modernity'<sup>44</sup>. Postmodernism cannot meet the ecological needs of the time because it is captive to the fetish of denying the realness of the natural world. The modern 'frame of reference' is inadequate because it promotes a 'groundlessness' which conduces to homelessness, alienation, a fixation upon technological tools and a treatment of the natural world as valueless except when it is reduced to human resource.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Spretnak, C. (1997), *The Resurgence of the Real: Body, Nature, and Place, in a Hypermodern World*, Addison-Wesley, Reading (Mass.), pp143.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p133.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp219-224.

Spretnak's ecospiritual perspective argues for 'freedom that flourishes *within* the web of life, not against it'.<sup>46</sup> Like Gablik and Abram, but unlike most of the ecological theorists I have considered here, Spretnak specifically discusses artists whose work, at least in part, shows an unwillingness 'to live with the denials and diminutions inherent in the destructive aspects of modernity'.<sup>47</sup> Spretnak's work provides a convenient link to the environmentally and ecologically focussed artists whose work I will discuss in the next chapter.

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p8.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p7.

## CHAPTER 4

### From Environmental Art to Ecological Art

The nineteenth century Romantics responded to 'the shock of the new': the massive social and environmental dislocations brought on by the Industrial Revolution. Their art, in one way, constituted a desperate plea to restore respect for Nature, to realise the place of humanity within Nature, to warn of the terrible natural events if Nature were to be violated by an arrogant mankind. ● Of J.M.W. Turner, [fig.13] Malcolm Andrews has written: 'Turner's concern to embed himself in the experience of the play of natural forces, and to let that experience dictate the terms on which the landscape image is constructed is a new development in the relationship between the artist and the natural world'.<sup>1</sup> In that their art was focussed upon individual spiritual enlightenment, and that their nature was ideal, sublime and determinedly picturesque, the Romantic artists could not be considered as 'ecological artists' in the terms I have outlined.



Figure 13

**J.M.W. Turner**

*Snow Storm – Steam Boat off a Harbour's Mouth making Signals in Shallow Water, and going by the Lead. The Author was in this Storm on the night the Ariel left Harwich (1842)*

Oil on canvas

91.4 x 121.9cm

Tate Gallery, London

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<sup>1</sup> Andrews, M. (1999), *Landscape and Western Art*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, p178.



Nevertheless, the Romantics could be seen as precursors of that ecological art which I have described. Indeed many contemporary wilderness photographs bear all the pictorial trappings, and aim for the same audience responses, as did the Romantics, particularly nineteenth century American landscape artists such as Frederic Church. [fig.14] Andrews, however, sees the problem of moving beyond the limitations of Romanticism as: 'the attempt to transmit the experience of nature as a constantly changing organism, not as a kind of grand-scale still life'.<sup>2</sup>



Figure 14

**Frederic Edwin Church (1826-1900)**  
*Twilight in the Wilderness* (1860)  
 Oil on canvas  
 101.6cm x 162.6cm  
 The Cleveland Museum of Art.

Without resorting to the visual rhetoric of Socialist Realism, large numbers of contemporary artists have embraced the notion that their art should address significant social issues. Pre-eminent among their concerns are issues concerning the environment. Despite contemporary artists in various parts of the world sharing similar values regarding the environment, there exist a diversity of artistic responses to it.

What came to be called 'Environmental Art', 'Earth Art', or 'Land Art' has paralleled the environmental movement itself over the past 30-40 years. These labels are virtually interchangeable. Andrews, for example, employs the term 'Earth

Art' and 'Land Art' interchangeably.<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Kastner mainly uses 'Land Art', but occasionally makes reference to 'Environmental Art', sometimes seeming to use the terms as synonyms and sometimes seeming to take 'Environmental Art' to be a subset of 'Land Art'.<sup>4</sup> In the discussion that follows I assume that these terms are interchangeable.

So-called Environmental Art has taken many forms – from the works of Christo and Jeanne-Claude to Smithson to Goldsworthy to Betty Beaumont<sup>5</sup>. In general, however, and in the artwork of each of the artists listed above, a defining characteristic of Environmental Art is that it constitutes a physical intervention within a specific, selected natural environment. Such an environment is not intended merely to provide a satisfactory 'backdrop' for the piece itself, however. The space around the work is inevitably transformed by virtue of the work's presence within it. The work's meaning derives not solely from forms actually fashioned by the artist, but from the juxtaposition of those forms with the natural forms and space of the given environment. To the environmental artist, the particular space in which a work is located is not neutral but, by virtue of the artist's intervention, becomes artistically activated, thus forming an integral part of the work's content. As such, a specific natural environment may be seen to provide both context and content for art.

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p179.

<sup>3</sup> *Op.cit.*

<sup>4</sup> Kastner, J. (1998), 'Preface', in J. Kastner (ed.), *Land and Environmental Art*, Phaidon, London.

<sup>5</sup> Beaumont collaborated with marine scientists in her 1978 project *Ocean Landmark Project* where 510 tonnes of industrial waste material became an underwater sculptural installation. On Christo (and Jeanne-Claude) see Baume, N. (ed.) (1990), *Christo: The John Kaldor Art Project*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Beaver Press, Sydney; on Smithson see N. Holt (1979) (ed.), *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, New York University Press, New York; on Goldsworthy see A. Goldsworthy (1990), *Andy Goldsworthy*, Viking, London.

Kastner describes the genesis of Land Art in this way:

What began in the mid 1960s with a small number of committed conceptualists – disenchanted with the modernist endgame and animated by a desire to measure the power of the artwork isolated from the cosmopolitan commodifications of the white cube – has grown over the last thirty years to include widely diverging forms, approaches and theoretical positions. Like the work that it embraces, the term Land Art is variable, complex and fraught. In many ways a quintessentially American art form... yet its formulation involved artists from around the world... whether seen... as a purposefully romantic quest for reconnection with a kind of atavistic inspiration or a serious-minded programme for the practical conditions of the late-industrial biosphere.<sup>6</sup>

Many environmental artists connect their works intimately with their respective environments by utilising *objets trouvés* from the site itself. Much of the work is ephemeral and remotely located. This means that the crucial medium for dissemination of an artwork is the photographic documentation which inevitably accompanies it. But more problematic, in my opinion, is the fact that, while much environmental art may be ‘environmental’ in the sense that it takes place within the environment itself, it is not ‘ecological’ because it constitutes a harmful manipulation of, and imposition upon natural processes. As Andrews writes, this is art that has ‘taken many forms’, from ‘minimalist and ephemeral intervention in the site itself’ to ‘the larger-scale sculptural earth work involving heavy construction equipment’.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, even artworks at the ‘ephemeral’ end of the scale may leave a permanent footprint: ‘In many cases, the site itself has *become* the place where the original landscape is now irrecoverable because its shape has been manipulated, however minimally, by the artist’.<sup>8</sup> It may be that such art constitutes ‘altogether more intimate relations with the raw materials of the original’, but as

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp11-12.

<sup>7</sup> Andrews, *op.cit.*, p205.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p204.

Andrews observes, they are still ‘acts of intervention’.<sup>9</sup>

I have already indicated that, in my opinion, an art that seeks to engage authentically – that is, ‘ecologically’ – with the natural world must be an art that will have no lasting impact upon it. The work of many environmental artists, however, has the opposite effect – one of major impact.



Figure 15

**Christo and Jeanne-Claude**  
*Wrapped Coast* (1969)  
Erosion-control fabric, rope  
93 sq. km  
Little Bay, Australia

Christo’s art may be perceived as being located at the extreme ‘interventionist’ end of environmental art. [fig.15] Robert Smithson, however, may be considered the environment-modifying artist *par excellence*. [fig.16] To Smithson, art is an essentially interventionist activity; it is a tool-using enterprise, a ‘making-over’ of an ‘earth canvas’ in the name of art:

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p205. The artists that I will discuss below situate their work in the environment itself. There may be environmental artists who do not actually position their work physically in the environment – who remain within traditional gallery spaces, for example – but the environmental artists whose work is relevant to my own are those who work directly within the ‘real’ biophysical world.

One's mind and the earth are in a constant state of erosion, mental rivers wear away abstract banks, brain waves undermine cliffs of thought, ideas decompose into stones of unknowing and conceptual crystallisations break apart into deposits of gritty reason.<sup>10</sup>

Smithson's comment has poetic resonances, and may even evoke an earth-sensitive disposition, but a close reading of this passage reveals a view that privileges constant and radical change. Smithson is articulating a concept of the natural world that effectively justifies the interventionist praxis of his own art. He likens himself not to an observer but to a gardener; a constructor of the environment. Andrews describes the association of such art 'with a kind of macho aggression in which the violation of the earth with huge mechanical diggers was seen as a raw assertion of male authority over Mother Earth'<sup>11</sup>, whereas Smithson defends his art as "a direct organic manipulation of the land", akin to cultivation'.<sup>12</sup>



Figure 16

**Robert Smithson**  
*Spiral Jetty* (1970)  
 Rocks, earth, salt crystals, water  
 6,783 tonnes earth, 1.450m; ø450  
 Great Salt Lake, Utah

<sup>10</sup> Smithson, R. (1998), 'A Sedimentation of the Mind: *Earth Projects* [1968]', in J. Kastner (ed.), *Land and Environmental Art*, Phaidon, London, p.211.

<sup>11</sup> Andrews, *op.cit.*, p.213.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

What is at stake here are rival conceptions of the obligations of the artist to nature. For Smithson there are none – the ‘right’ of the creative human, equipped with transformative tools, is paramount and unqualified. For me, the nature of the global ecological crisis makes this decidedly Cartesian conception of the rights of the artist irresponsible and indefensible.

Another extreme interventionist is Michael Heizer. Though Heizer ‘has spoken of his sculptural work as a kind of language to re-establish dialogue with the earth’<sup>13</sup>, it is a most brutal and conflict-justifying dialogue that he sets up. His best known work, *Double Negative* (1969-70), [fig.18] is described by Kastner thus:

A massive 244,800 tons (244,800 tonnes) of earth was moved with the help of bulldozers which excavated from two sides from a valley wall. The displaced earth was banked up in front of the bulldozers to form two horizontal ramps. Commenting on the title, the artist stated, “in order to create this sculpture material was removed rather than accumulated... There is nothing there, yet it is still a sculpture”.<sup>14</sup>



Figure 17

**Michael Heizer**  
*Double Negative* (1969-70)  
 244,800 tonne displacement  
 Rhyolite, sandstone  
 457 x 15 x 9 m  
 Mormon Mesa, Overton, Nevada

However Heizer’s project may be defended in artistic terms, in terms of a view which asserts art’s (and humankind’s) ethical obligations to the natural world, his work would be instantly

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p212.

<sup>14</sup> Author not identified (1998), Untitled description of Heizer’s *Double Negative* [1969-70], in J. Kastner (ed.), *Land and Environmental Art*, Phaidon, London, p54.



disqualified. In fact, though Heizer works in the natural world and with natural materials, it is difficult to conceive of an art praxis more fundamentally at odds with nature.

Many environmental artists connect their work directly to the change agenda of the wider environment movement. Barbara Matilsky maintains that artists are in a unique position to change public attitudes toward the environment because they can synthesise new ideas in their images and communicate connections between many disciplines. In *Fragile Ecologies* (1992), Matilsky states:

... artists are... pioneering a holistic approach to problem solving that transcends narrow limits of specialization. Since art embodies freedom of thought, spirit and expression, its creative potential is limitless. Art changes the way people look at reality. In its most positive mode, art can offer alternative visions.<sup>15</sup>

Seeking transitional links between environmental art and my own, I would cite the art of Richard Long and Andy Goldsworthy respectively. Each of these artists has become progressively more ecologically aware, and each has adapted his art so that it has become increasingly considerate of the ecological values within the artwork's host environment.



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<sup>15</sup> Matilsky, B. (1992), *Fragile Ecologies: Contemporary Artists' Interpretations and Solutions*, Queens Museum of Art, Rizzoli, New York, p3.

Long has moved from making artworks which left large marks on the terrain – albeit the works were intended to be more or less transitory – to a much more ephemeral art, often consisting largely of the activity of walking.

He describes his art as ‘the antithesis of so-called American “Land Art”, where the artist needed... to claim possession of the land and to wield machinery. True capitalist art.’<sup>16</sup> And in an interview with Georgia Lobacheff, Long stated:

I call myself an artist. Nature is the source of my work. The medium of my work is walking (the element of time) and natural materials (sculpture). For me, the label ‘Land Art’ represents North American monumental earthworks, and my work has nothing to do with that.<sup>17</sup>

By contrast, he writes, ‘I like the idea of using the land without possessing it’.<sup>18</sup> [fig.18]

Goldsworthy is slightly more complex, because there is no clear period of transition from his more permanent, intrusive artworks – notably those working with historic stone structures in Cumbria – and his ephemeral pieces. I regard his permanent work positively, because it mostly avoids the problems I have already associated with environmental art. Andrews writes of Goldsworthy’s council-sponsored work, *Jack’s Fold* (1996): ‘It is part restoration, part Land-Art, part craft revival, and is emphatically linked to the community environment. It is an attempt to re-historicize in social and economic terms, a landscape’.<sup>19</sup> As Kenneth Baker writes, ‘Many of Goldsworthy’s Sheepfolds works are inconspicuous because they involve

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<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Andrews, *op.cit.*, p215.

<sup>17</sup> Long, R. (1998), *Mirage*, Phaidon, London, np.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Andrews, *op.cit.*, p215.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p218.



modifications to stone structures that remain in use, despite the new identity he has given them as works of sculpture'.<sup>20</sup> [fig. 19]

But it is his ephemeral pieces that have most strongly influenced my ideas on art as communication and on what constitutes an authentic praxis of ecological art.



Figure 19

**Andy Goldsworthy**  
*Sheep Folds Project* (1996) Detail  
One of The Fifteen Drove Stones  
Dry Stone  
Casterton, Cumbria

'At its most successful', Goldsworthy himself has written, 'my "touch" looks into the heart of nature; most days I don't even get close. These things are all part of a transient process that I cannot understand unless my touch is also transient'.<sup>21</sup>

A good example of this is *Ice Piece* (1987), [fig.20] a work which epitomises transience. Such works have been described thus:

Goldsworthy creates works in the landscape using found materials and processes... the works are often very short-lived and are recorded as photographs. Goldsworthy's interventions in nature heighten our awareness of the beauty of nature as well as its enduring and also ephemeral qualities.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Baker, K. (2000), 'Introduction', in A. Goldsworthy, *Wall*, Thames & Hudson, London, p15.

<sup>21</sup> Goldsworthy, A. (1990), *Andy Goldsworthy*, Viking, London, np.

<sup>22</sup> Author not identified (1998), Untitled description of Goldsworthy's 'Ice Piece', in J. Kastner (ed.), *Land and Environmental Art*, Phaidon, London, p69.



Figure 20

**Andy Goldsworthy**  
*Ice Piece* 7-8/10-11 January, 1987  
 Cibachrome photograph  
 76x76cm  
 Scaur Water, Penpont,  
 Dumfriesshire, Scotland.

Of particular relevance to this research has been the German artist, Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), for whom it was ‘self-evident that the political dimension should always form part of the unity of art and life’.<sup>23</sup> I have already discussed the importance of Beuys as a maker of ‘non-gallery’ art. Here I will confine myself to comment on his status as a precursor of ecological art.

Beuys possessed a profoundly ‘ecological’ view of the way humans are linked to the rest of the natural world, and he constructed an ecological conception of art on the basis of this insight. The ‘feeling of a primal oneness’ that Beuys sought to evoke in his art is best described by Peter-Klauss Schuster:

All of Beuys’ artistic actions and provocations were thus directed toward regenerating man’s creativity, submerged beneath the constant use of reason. Beuys hoped that the man whose creativity was thus revitalised would also develop a less

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<sup>23</sup> Staack, K. (1986), “‘Democracy is Fun’”, in T. Nevill (trans.), *Joseph Beuys: In Memory Joseph Beuys. Obituaries. Essays, Speeches, Inter Nationes*, Bonn, p12.

reified relationship with nature. He would no longer comprehend himself as an individual form of existence, disciplined and reduced by learnt skills, but rather as a creative element within an all-embracing organism or – viewed in terms of Renaissance ideas about nature – as a microcosm of a universal macrocosm.<sup>24</sup>

With his conception of human embeddedness in nature, Beuys extended his ecological conception of art to his art materials, working with ‘deliberately paltry materials such as felt, lard, dead animals and refuse...’, and investing these materials with ‘frankly provocative absurdity, so as to illustrate such extremely simple polar contrasts as heat and cold, recipient and transmitter, birth and death, feminine and masculine, and organic and crystalline’. There is no seam between Beuys’ concept of art and his concept of ecology: his ‘understanding of man and nature [is] derived from art and [from] organic rather than rational principles of thought’.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, this is a view of art that incorporates the sort of activist praxis that, as I have argued, is integral to ecological art. As Schuster says: ‘Beuys devoted himself from 1958 to saving man through art instead of self-realisation and thus the threat of self-destruction through science and technology’.<sup>26</sup>

In Chapter 3 I described the work of ecological thinkers who have made a case for a grounded spirituality. I also noted the influence of their thought upon my approach to art. Beuys’ ecological art praxis was suffused with a similar spirituality. Caroline Tisdall, for example, notes: ‘Beuys’ belief [was] that the human being is fundamentally a spiritual being, and that our vision of the world must be extended to encompass all the

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<sup>24</sup> Schuster, P-K. (1986), ‘Man as His own Creator: Dürer and Beuys – or the Affirmation of Creativity’, in T. Nevill (trans.), *Joseph Beuys: In Memory Josephy Beuys. Obituaries. Essays. Speeches*, Inter Nationes, Bonn, p19.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p20.

invisible energies with which we have lost contact, or from which we have become alienated.<sup>27</sup>

Much of the spiritual energy in nature is to be accessed through contact and communication with animals. 'They are fantastic entities and generators for the production of spiritual goods', Beuys wrote: 'They have soul powers, feeling powers, powers of instinct and orientation'.<sup>28</sup>



Figure 21

**Joseph Beuys**

*Coyote: I like America and America Likes Me. (1974)*

Action at the Galerie René Block,  
New York, 21-25 May 1974

Photograph by Lorraine Senna

Contact with such powers, Tisdall writes, must be re-established, because 'behind the power of each species stands the spirit of its group consciousness, or group soul'. Thus animals 'have preserved intact many of the abilities that are underdeveloped in the human species, or which had to be lost'.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Tisdall, C. (1980), *Joseph Beuys: Coyote*, Schirmer/Mosel, Munich, p22.

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p25.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

These principles were all in operation in one of Beuys' best known works, the performance piece, *Coyote: I like America and America Likes Me*, at the René Block Gallery, New York, in May 1974. [fig.21] Over the period of a week, Beuys ('the man') interacted with a coyote in an enclosed space. Tisdall describes it thus:

The man brought objects and elements from his world to place in this space, silent representatives of his ideas and beliefs. He introduced them to the coyote. The coyote responded coyote-style by claiming them with his gesture of possession. One by one as they were presented he pissed on them slowly and deliberately: felt, walking stick, gloves, flashlight and Wall Street Journal, but above all the Wall Street Journal... The man never took his eyes off the animal. The line of sight between them became like the hands of the spiritual clock measuring the timing of movements and setting the pace for the dialogue through time. The man carried out his sequence of movements, a choreography directed towards the coyote, the timing and the mood regulated by the animal... Man and animal grew closer together: it was as if they had always been there.<sup>30</sup>

The work is full of deeply symbolic interactions. The coyote, for example, was chosen because of the belief that the animal had arrived in North America as a companion of the peoples of the First Nations. As an exploration of the charged nature of the interchange between human being and nature the work is particularly poignant:

And then it was time to go. The man took the animal straw and scattered it slowly over the space. He took his leave of Little John, hugging him close without concealing the pain of separation... he was not there to see the coyote's reaction. Suddenly finding himself alone without the man's presence, Little John behaved for the first time like a caged and captive animal...<sup>31</sup>

This piece has had a major influence on my own work. It is almost an exemplar of what I am trying to achieve. Art here is a

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp20-22.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p22. I do have one misgiving about this project. Despite the spiritual bonding that Beuys achieved with 'Little John' the context in which this occurred was entirely of Beuys' choosing; that is, the relationship was structured entirely in accordance with the human's needs and the needs of the animal were neither known in advance nor ascertained.

communicative device; it is a medium of social exchange, both within the piece itself and between performance and viewing. And in its direct representation of human-animal interchange, and the potential contained within such interchange, it is also deeply spiritual and ecological.

Today, Beuys is considered a more important artist in a 'universal' sense than was the case during his lifetime, though he had a loyal band of followers in the 1970s and 1980s. Perhaps much of this early neglect stemmed from ignorance and/or prejudice against ecological art, or ecological orientations in art. In addition, Beuys' work was not saleable: he did not construct 'commodities', and much of his work – *Coyote*, for example – was specifically conceived as a temporary piece. Furthermore, much of his art did not occur in conventional gallery situations. In addition, there is a:

provocative lack of beauty and formlessness of so many of Beuys' productions, only a few of which can be termed works in the traditional sense. Beuys scared off many of his fellow-countrymen with his radical rejection of everything that could be termed art, a work, beautiful, or even classical...<sup>32</sup>

Other artists who have been important influences within my project are the Canberra-based Australian sculptor, Jill Peck, the group winners of the 1999 Governor of Osaka Prefecture Prize, and the Austrian sculptor, Robert Gschwantner.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Wiegand, W. (1986), 'The Message of Death: Joseph Beuys' Vision of Reality', in T. Nevill (trans.), *Joseph Beuys: In Memoriam Joseph Beuys. Obituaries. Essays. Speeches*, Inter Nationes, Bonn, p8.

<sup>33</sup> In relation to this research, I have considered the various modes of visual communication employed by the Australian, Megan Jones, and the Americans, Betty Beaumont and Newton and Helen Harrison in their response to aquatic problems. I am also interested in the photographer Allan Sekula, who also makes metaphoric use of the shipping container. (Sekula, A. (1996), *Fish Story*, Richter Verlag, Dusseldorf). Again, due to limitations of space I have reluctantly omitted a consideration of the work of the artists noted here.

Jill Peck's sculptural works are of particular relevance to this research. Peck is a public artist who works collaboratively with scientists, and with oceanographic themes. Peck employs a similar range of materials to those which I have used in my earlier work – for example, cables, boating shackles and fixtures, stainless steel and aluminium. Whilst I have engaged in collaborative work with CSIRO, she has worked with the Australian Geological Survey Organisation's seismic scientific data in an installation for the Canberra National Sculpture Forum (1995). In this way, she effectively closes the gap that distances much scientific exploration from a general audience, while her personal communication with the scientist in his own arena serves to bridge the gap between scientific and artistic understandings.

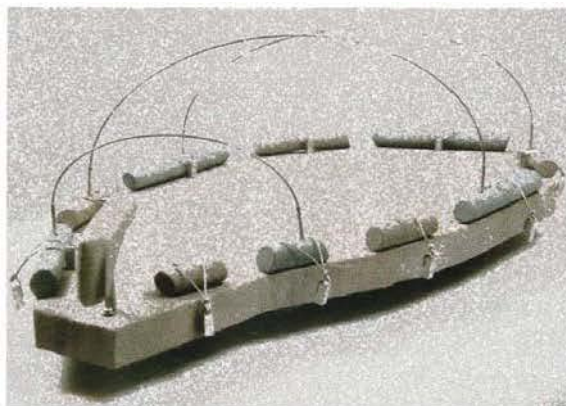


Figure 22

**Jill Peck**  
*Undercurrent* (1999)  
 Etched sandstone, marine stainless steel  
 12 x 6 m  
 Dorian Photographics

In *Undercurrent* (1999), Peck etches within sandstone:

Seismic profiles taken of the earth underneath the Arafura Sea, the submerged land bridge between Australia and Asia. These graphic striations are deduced from results collected from ultrasound measurement along the ocean floor...by contrast to their timeless subject, these scientific recordings have a transient material life. Jill Peck's monumental recovery of these lines stakes a claim on different territory – the common



aesthetic ground that underlies all representational pursuits, whether in the laboratory or studio.<sup>34</sup>

The sandstone blocks are in the shape of upturned boats, and boats of stone are recurrent motifs in her work. Ecological degradation below the surface of the ocean is often overlooked by virtue of the fact that it remains hidden from general view. In *Undercurrents*, Peck reveals hidden complexities. Her work is motivated by similar concerns and issues to those which have influenced my own work, and it explores similar boundaries to the explorations undertaken within this research. As such, Peck's success in achieving her aims provides me with confidence in the value of ecologically-driven projects and the validity of my own praxis.

In 1999, in the Ninth International Design Competition, the Governor of Osaka Prefecture Prize was awarded to a work entitled *Territories of Interwoven Genetic Design*. [fig.23] The competition website describes the work thus:

a vast living textile covers over what was a polluted and unused industrial harbour and is now transformed through biotechnology into a unique and animated ecosystem. Interweaving the organic with the artificial, the sublime with the urban life, this designed living system is a new territory of inhabitation and experience.<sup>35</sup>

The work is a collaboration between two Canadian architects, Aniko Meszaros and Sean Hanna, and an England-based molecular microbiologist, Donald A. Cowan.

None of the *Territories of Interwoven Genetic Design* collaborators is an artist in the conventional sense of the word,

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<sup>34</sup> Murray, K. (1999), 'The Art of Inner Space', in *métis: Exhibitions of Science and Art, National Science Week, Canberra, May 1999*, CSIRO, Canberra, p23.

<sup>35</sup> Governor of Osaka Prefecture Prize

Accessed online 13/6/02

[http://www.jidpo.or.jp/jdf/competition/9c/9c\\_03e.html](http://www.jidpo.or.jp/jdf/competition/9c/9c_03e.html)



and this is not, in a conventional sense, a work of art. It is a biotechnological 'invention'. The website describes it thus:

The biological textile creates new growth-accelerated and responsive species that can float, support human weight, repair themselves, transform and adapt to inhabitation of both animal and human and flower when touched... Single celled organisms are genetically combined with DNA characteristics of land plants and local samples to invent species with engineered site-specific behaviours and responses. The environmental distribution of the macrophytes is carried out through a floating pasteurised cable network where final engineered characteristics in the continuing cycle occurs: a chemical catalyst is sent through the network triggering organism reproduction to change from dividing single-cells into a system of filamentous branching plants which grow into a complex and diverse woven surface.<sup>36</sup>



Figure 23

Aniko Meszaros, Sean Hanna, Donald Cowan  
*Territories of Interwoven Genetic Design*  
Governor of Osaka Prefecture Prize.

This project was seen by the Osaka jury as a 'positive experimental attempt to improve the current situation in terms of environmental conservation, and to solve environmental problems for the future'.<sup>37</sup> Art considerations are nowhere mentioned. But I would contend that an important characteristic of ecological art is that it challenges conceptions as to what constitutes art, of what the social role of the artist is, and of where the boundaries lie between artwork and other modes of social expression. In Dewey's view of art as an integral element of

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[http://www.jidpo.or.jp/jdf/competition/9c/9c\\_03e.html](http://www.jidpo.or.jp/jdf/competition/9c/9c_03e.html)

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

society and its processes, old boundaries wither away. *Territories of Interwoven Genetic Design* is a collaboration, on ecological issues, between design and science – and it is strongly visual, though not conventionally beautiful. It is a project, then, that challenges and extends concepts of art. *Territories of Interwoven Genetic Design* has influenced my consideration of what may be deemed an acceptable methodology or mode of communication within an art practice.

Robert Gschwantner also employs themes of marine degradation. His work consists of what he calls ‘oil carpets’: ‘labour intensive, technically brilliant and ephemerally beautiful works [that] resemble rugs or mats made from woven PVC tubing’, and named for sunken oil tankers and other marine pollution disasters, ‘names that instantly conjure up pictures of environmental havoc’.<sup>38</sup> Again, given the close parallels between Gschwantner’s intentions and my own – specifically, in reference to matters of marine ecological degradation – his work is of considerable importance to me. Like myself, he has focused upon problems associated with shipping. In his *mêtis-Wasted* 2001 work, *Erika* (2000), Gschwantner uses:

commercially available, brightly coloured oils to make works that shimmer in the light, causing beauty and poison. *Erika...* is made from 1,000 metres of tubing cut into 12,500 pieces and filled with high speed motor oil from Total, the company responsible for the Erika’s spill.<sup>39</sup>

Gschwantner’s work is formed out of seductively beautiful materials which induce an aesthetic response on the part of the viewer. A recurring objection to an artist’s deployment of forms which possess a ‘beauty’ in order to bring attention to subject matter that is not, however, inherently ‘beautiful’ is that it is not possible – or even ethical – to evoke the desired feelings of

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<sup>38</sup> Turner, J. (2001), ‘Oiling the Works’, in B. Nogrady (ed.), *mêtis 2001: Wasted*, CSIRO, Dickson (ACT), p27.

<sup>39</sup> Barney, J. (2001), ‘Wasted’, *Artlink*, vol. 21, no. 1, p65.

dismay, disgust or anger *through* 'beauty'. I consider, however, that once a person has responded to an artwork aesthetically, they are thereby opened up to meanings on a range of levels – including conceptions of the 'un-beautiful'. The cliché of 'a terrible beauty' describes, perhaps, the essence of the sublime, an archetypal artistic aspiration. Gschwantner's work draws attention to the contrast between conventional beauty and real-world degradation. As such, I believe, his work has political resonance.



Figure 24

**Robert Gschwantner**  
*Erika* (2000)  
PVC tubing, motor oil  
Size unknown  
Photograph by Paolo Cipolina

Gschwantner continues to exhibit mainly within galleries, but the nature of his themes and materials, and the effectiveness of his deployment of a language of visual aesthetics as effective political communication, make his work of intense interest to me.

Within this chapter I have acknowledged and described environmental and ecological artists whose work provides a context within which my research may be located. In Chapter 5, I discuss my own work and define the contribution this research makes to the field of visual art.

## CHAPTER 5

### My Research and its Component Artworks

#### How the Research Developed: Praxis and Strategies

The artworks which I have produced in this research should be seen not simply as ends in themselves, but as components of more complex projects. Thus I have described my research activities and outcomes not as art *works* as such, but as art *projects*. My research concerns an application of art beyond art itself, and it is here, in its development of communicative strategies and synergistic relationships with industry, science and the community, that it seeks to add to our understanding of potential applications of art, notably, in my case, in respect of the marine environment.

In the following account of the processes which have led to my artistic outcomes, I discuss how works have been conceived and the evolution of their form, content and meaning. I also describe processes other than of the purely artistic kind: networking and negotiations, technical, personnel and venue-specific issues, for example. Though these considerations may seem relatively mundane and outside the scope of ‘pure’ artistic research, they have been highly significant factors in the conceptualisation and realisation of my artworks. Lucy Lippard has written that ‘activist art is, above all, process oriented’, one in which art is an ‘engagement... a mutually stimulating dialogue’.<sup>1</sup> Thus I consider both dimensions – the logistic as well as the artistic – to be central components of my methodology: ‘methodology’ referring to the means by which research outcomes have been achieved.

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<sup>1</sup> Lippard, L. (1984), ‘Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power’, in B. Wallis [ed.], *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation*, Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, p343.

I have also argued that the integrity of the process is as fundamental as the final product to an authentically *ecological* art. For this reason, too, much of what follows concentrates on process; how individual art projects have come into being, how they have fitted within a coherent wider project, how networks have been established that link individual art projects, and how strategies for ecological communication through art have evolved and been adapted to contextual circumstances. In some cases the process has been an unusually prolonged one, with years passing between genesis and realisation. Some are ongoing. Thus an account of my research that eschews explanation of its strategic and process dimensions would be deficient.

Earlier in the dissertation I described my view of the social function of art. I also outlined impulses and influences stemming from formative experiences in my background that conduced to the development of an ecological commitment, and specifically to a concern for ecological issues that bear upon the wellbeing of the marine environment. The conjunction of these views on art and ecology constitutes my art praxis.

In the course of my search for appropriate artistic modes I have deployed various processes and media. My undergraduate work was largely within printmaking, and when I began this project I envisaged remaining within this medium. I produced large-scale mixed-media prints in installation-type formats, but came to perceive limitations in this mode. Having mounted and reflected upon my own gallery exhibitions, I considered that a socially-focussed art must reach a larger, non art-specialist public if it is to achieve its aims. This led to my moving away from printmaking and seeking expressive modes more suited to alternative public space exhibition.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Earlier in the exegesis I discussed the issues involved in public, as opposed to gallery, exhibition.

I subsequently worked with a range of mixed-media and 'new media' technologies, as I explored different modes and strategies for adapting the visual language of art to concerns of marine ecology. In the process I had to master a new and technologically challenging range of equipment, setting up a studio on an entirely new and unfamiliar basis. I had to learn – and rapidly – a new range of logistical variables to do with the suitability of venues. More than that, I was forced to acknowledge that it was not simply a question of finding a venue to suit the art. Rather, the venue itself was a key *determinant* of the artistic mode, and indeed of the total art project. Hence, much of my work has been site-specific, and, in order that it not transgress my self-imposed strictures on the need for ecological art to tread lightly, I have had to be especially vigilant in assessing the extent to which my work has the potential to alter characteristics of the site in the longer term. As well as the need to become more skilled in forms of art technology and relevant software, I have required the input of others with expertise in the more technologically-complex processes.

The nature of my project has also necessitated my working with non-art professionals, particularly scientists involved in relevant issues of marine ecology. Ballast dumping – the particular focus of my research – is not only an issue of global import; it is also an issue of specific relevance to Tasmania. The CSIRO Marine Division, the National Oceans Office, and the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) all have their headquarters in Hobart.

The issue of collaboration assumed major importance, much more so than I could have predicted. I have already discussed the extent to which an ecologically-focussed project is philosophically conducive to the concept of



collaboration<sup>3</sup>. Within my evolving praxis of ecological art, collaboration became an important enterprise in its own right.

My research has had to contend with numerous obstacles of a non-artistic kind. During the course of my project I have encountered scepticism regarding the potential of art and the artist to influence values within the larger community, as well as toward art's communicative capacity. There have also been substantial logistical problems, which must be accepted as normal for artists working in the public domain. Public art requires high-visibility settings (because such art is pointless unless it is seen by large numbers of people). These may not be available, nor may they be adaptable to specific artistic purposes. The nature of the setting may thus significantly constrain artistic possibilities, as do costs and technical difficulties involving use of equipment. Short-term crises may arise requiring the intervention of additional, uninitiated (and uninvited) personnel – who then become unwitting collaborators in the production of an artwork. Finally, in this discussion of praxis and strategies, I should indicate the two principal audience cohorts that I have sought to reach through my public art projects: namely, decision-makers from the spheres of industry and science on the one hand, and the wider public on the other.

### **Description of the Component Artworks**

From my discussion of praxis and strategies it will be clear that a major challenge of this research has been that of presenting my artworks in broad public settings. The several projects described below, employing as they do different visual art modes, should

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<sup>3</sup> In the collaborations I discuss here, the role of the visual artist – a role described earlier as that of a creative interlocutor – is highly demanding, subtle, and variable from context to context. In my work 'collaboration' can apply to a complex of relationships with artists who work in non-visual creative modes, with scientists, with people in industry, and with public sector managers. When referring to non-art collaborations (with industry, for example) I have occasionally had recourse to the term 'partnership'. Outside the parameters of this research, and in the future, I would like to be involved in art collaborations that are more genuinely partnerships.

be seen essentially as different strategies for the presentation of an ecologically-motivated art.

During my Honours year (1998), much of my artwork had been presented in site-specific 'non-art' settings, specially-selected locations within which decisions were being made on issues concerning the marine environment. These locations – all in Hobart – included Parliament House, the Tasmanian State Government Offices, the Marine Board Building and the Marine Research Division of the CSIRO, where I mounted my final Honours exhibition. This activity enabled me to forge links with industrial and statutory stakeholders concerned with marine ecosystems.

On commencing my PhD studies, I registered a business, 'Q-Ecology'. This was necessary if I was to seek external funds, and, I considered, if I was to be accorded credibility by the industry interests with which I sought partnerships. In stating Q-Ecology's mission, I promoted the development of productive relationships with scientific and industrial interests involved in the issues concerning the marine ecosystem. Through contemporary artwork presented in 'non-art' settings, and often in collaboration with other creative personnel, Q-Ecology set out to raise an awareness of marine ecology in the wider community, and to demonstrate the positive role that art could play in the promotion of environmental responsibility. These aims were set out in a brochure.

In March 1999 I took the brochure to 'Ballast Water: Where to from Here', a ground-breaking international conference<sup>4</sup> held in Brisbane. Here I renewed important contacts previously made at the Australian Ballast Water Management Council meeting in

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<sup>4</sup> This was the first time in seven years that the global scientific/technological community had come together to establish the baseline position concerning ballast water management and to determine the nature of the international regime that needed to be put in place in the years ahead.



Canberra which I had attended in 1998. My attendance at this second conference seemed to have convinced other delegates that my commitment was serious and ongoing. Present were Michael Julian, Chairman of the London-based International Maritime Organisation's Maritime Environmental Protection Council (MEPC); Dr. Meryl Williams, Director-General of ICLARM, the World Fish Center [sic], based in Malaysia; Dr. Rex Pyne, Deputy Commissioner of Fisheries in the Northern Territory; Associate Professor Gustaaf Hallegraeff of the University of Tasmania's School of Plant Science; CoastCare personnel; several CSIRO marine scientists; and members of the Aquaculture Council of Tasmania. With each of these parties a working relationship was put in place, and these have resulted in most of the projects that have subsequently constituted the work for this research.

In addition to the productive networking that occurred at this conference – and that, in effect, set up the terms and conduct of my research – I also made a poster presentation in which I outlined a case for the role of the artist as a creative interlocutor within environmental problem-solving processes, and for the educational and communicative potential of art when important issues of water quality are taken into the public domain. [fig.25] My poster consisted of a computer-generated detail of an installation made prior to the current research period. The central image is a detail of an electron microscope photograph of a dinoflagellate, colour-enhanced, while the others include a marine engineering 'wire-boat' image of a container ship, typical of the type to have built-in ballast tanks.

The success of the Q-Ecology brochure as an introductory device led me to produce three additional brochures, each on the issue of Optimum Water Quality, but 'customised' for a distinct audience: tourism, industry, and 'general', respectively.

On at least two subsequent occasions during the course of my research I initiated communicative strategies that, in themselves,

constituted important sub-projects within the overall research. As with the 1999 Brisbane conference, these activities were crucial for my subsequent art projects' realisation.



Figure 25

**Jane Quon**

*Ballast Trade 11* (1999) (detail)

'Ballast Water Where To From Here' Conference

Brisbane, March 1999

60 x 85cm (image variable)

First, at the beginning of 2000, I again contacted Michael Julian. Based in Canberra, Mr. Julian holds important positions with both the International Maritime Organisation and the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA). Discussions were also held with Analisse Caston, Adviser in Policy and Regulatory Environmental Protection Standards with the IMO, regarding opportunities for future art-promotional projects on the theme of marine ecosystems, and to obtain information on national and international organisations with similar charters.<sup>5</sup> Discussions were also held with personnel from the Penang-based international environmental NGO, the World Fish Center,[sic] at the time known as the International Center for Living Aquatic Marine Resource Management (ICLARM). My research took me to Penang for discussions with Dr. Meryl Williams, Director-General of the organisation, and other senior personnel. Two ambitious art projects developed as a consequence of these meetings. One was a commission to provide artworks for the

<sup>5</sup> These contacts provided information on forthcoming international events and the possibility of mounting art projects in association with these. I decided to target one of the IMO conventions to be held in London in 2001 and 2002. I also visited and entered into dialogue with the Hellenic Maritime Environmental Protection Association (HELMEPA), a national education program in Greece concerned with water quality, with a view to developing artworks for installation at relevant locations in Greece in the future.

World Fish Center's new Penang Headquarters then about to be built; the other was to develop artworks 'in the field' as strategies for ecological communication.<sup>6</sup> I assess the outcomes of my own negotiations as overwhelmingly positive. From them, I was able to establish partnerships which would constitute a contextual framework for my developing an art of ecological communication.

More recently, from 2-5 July 2002, I attended the interdisciplinary Environment, Culture and Community Conference at the University of Queensland, where I was invited to make a joint presentation within the program segment, 'Raising Environmental Awareness through Art'. My presentation was entitled 'An Application of Multimedia Art to Marine Ecosystem Degradation'.<sup>7</sup> The conference provided numerous contacts within the humanities disciplines, which have complemented the more industry-based and science-oriented networks established at earlier conferences.

## Art Project 1

### *The Enemy Below:*

### *The Black Striped Mussel Invasion of Darwin*

The first artwork to be realised as an outcome of the contacts made in Brisbane in 1999 was an art event, *The Enemy Below: The Black Striped Mussel Invasion of Darwin* (1999).<sup>8</sup> In this deployment of the art event as a communicative strategy, the aim

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<sup>6</sup> A documentation film and slides of visitation to the World Fish Center headquarters and the initial stages of my artwork are included in the DVD that accompanies this exegesis as part of the documentation for my submission, associated material is also included in the hard copy folio.

<sup>7</sup> The presentation was a collaboration with Lindsay Broughton, and comprised the presentation of a formal paper along with the screening of my video pieces. These included in particular my most recent – *Marine Incursion* – as presented to the IMO in London in March 2002.

<sup>8</sup> Excerpts of 'The Enemy Below' are included in the DVD that accompanies this exegesis as part of the documentation for my submission, and associated material is included in the hard copy folio.

was to demonstrate that educational strategies other than the conventional lecture presented by a particular expert could effectively demonstrate such issues as the March 1999 invasion of three Darwin marinas by an introduced marine pest, the black striped mussel (*Mytilopsis sallei*).<sup>9</sup>

During the 1999 Brisbane conference, Dr. Rex Pyne, Deputy Commissioner of Fisheries in the Northern Territory, delivered a riveting speech on the then-recent black striped mussel invasion in Darwin Harbour. I subsequently invited him to come to Hobart to make a similar presentation as part of an art event for senior secondary students<sup>10</sup>. He accepted – and became the first of numerous prominent individuals in the areas of science, statutory authority, industry and local government to support this research.

For the subsequent multimedia event, the challenge was to find a form of presentation that seemed appropriate for the 17-18 years age group, in terms of media, imagery, sound, lighting, and

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<sup>9</sup> On 29 March 1999 the highly invasive salt-water zebra mussel, *Mytilopsis sallei* was discovered in plague proportions at Cullen Bay and Tipperary Waters Marinas in Darwin in the Northern Territory. The marine pest was introduced on the hull of a pleasure boat moored in Francis Bay Marina, and was discovered in a routine check of the area by the Centre of Research for Introduced Marine Pests (CRIMP) of the Tasmanian Division of CSIRO. Quarantine measures were set in place: 260 tons of liquid sodium hypochlorite and 9 tons of copper sulphate were used for eradication. Environmentally, such an eradication strategy was radical, but, against the potentially catastrophic disaster to the natural ecology of Australia's waters and the economic consequences of the pearl fishing industry in the Northern Territory, it was considered a risk worth taking. The costs of the eradication exercise were in excess of \$2.6 million. Implementation for the response fell to the Deputy Commissioner of Fisheries, Dr. Rex Pyne, who instigated changes in legislation for the procedure. The situation was unique in that the species could be contained within locked marinas where dealing with the situation was made possible. National response mechanisms have since been negotiated. While the black striped mussel experience may have been traumatic, the challenges we face in the future are even larger. This event has been recognised globally as a world first in management practice for an introduced pest within foreign waters. Accessed online 18/5/99: [http://www.nt.go.au/news/cullen\\_bay\\_interstate.shtml](http://www.nt.go.au/news/cullen_bay_interstate.shtml)

<sup>10</sup> The art event was specifically devised for an audience of year 11/12 art students from Southern Tasmanian schools and colleges.

overall design, or 'choreography'. Specifically, the event involved video, computer, music and sound, presented in both pre-recorded and live formats with two scripted and separate live presentations, by Dr. Pyne and myself respectively. I intended the presentation to evoke a feeling of immediacy and spontaneity, with improvisation a feature.



Figure 26

**Jane Quon**

*The Enemy Below: The Black Striped Mussel  
Invasion of Darwin (1999)*

Performance, video, computer and sound

Still image from video documentation

●original video still ● Mick Baron

Because of the complexity of an event presented 'live', two additional collaborating artists (video artist Sean Bacon and computer technician/artist Ken Ford) manipulated and improvised with imagery sourced by myself<sup>11</sup>, at the same time that Dr Pyne and I, in turn, made live verbal presentations. Dr. Pyne, albeit a senior public service manager and a distinguished scientist, enthusiastically assumed the role of 'performance artist' within the event. As such, he too functioned as an extremely willing and highly effective collaborator. In the early stages of the event, I sought advice and support from local scientists – from CSIRO, the Tasmanian Museum and Art

<sup>11</sup> Licence for the imagery was obtained from the Black Mussel Incursion site on the internet, from CSIRO's Centre for Research into Introduced Marine Pests, from Mick Baron at the Eaglehawk Dive Centre, from Karen Gowlett-Holmes and from the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

Gallery, the Hobart City Council and the private sector. These contacts have been maintained and re-activated in later projects.

The forty-five minute public presentation, which took place in the University of Tasmania's Centre for the Arts Lecture Theatre, consisted of pre-recorded 'clean' underwater imagery<sup>12</sup>, pre-recorded imagery of the Darwin emergency itself, and pre-recorded images of Dr. Pyne speaking. This enabled the presentation to move between real-time and slowed-down speech which effects served to heighten the dramatic import of Dr. Pyne's message. I sought to present him as a 'larger-than-life', even heroic figure, a scientist combating an alien invasion. His image on the screen was imposing and extremely powerful, and he 'crossed the line' from expert/lecturer and senior public servant to performance artist with great aplomb. [fig.27]

When the coloured images were projected onto Dr. Pyne and beyond to the sail-shaped screen, a silhouette of the performer and lectern produced an unexpected synergy. They were no longer static props to the commentary, but integral parts of the projection. Dr. Pyne stood at a lectern at centre-right, with three live black-and-white surveillance cameras fixed upon him.<sup>13</sup> A switching box allowed the video operator (Sean Bacon) to move between video and any of the three live cameras. The switching device was deliberately crude, so as to produce a static effect that would convey an immediacy, a spontaneity, a feeling that the event was not, for all the pre-recording, an ordained happening. My intention was to capture a sense of urgency.

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<sup>12</sup> Seven of these images were later screenprinted and digitally printed for exhibition in *Ecological Manipulations* and are described later in the exegesis.

<sup>13</sup> A description of equipment used in this project is given in Appendix 3





Figure 27

Jane Quon

*The Enemy Below: The Black Striped Mussel  
Invasion of Darwin (1999)*

Performance, video, computer and sound  
Still image from video documentation

The event concluded with my own presentation, [fig 28] in which I explained my role as an ecological artist and my wider artistic project (see Appendix 3). The event was preceded by an ABC radio interview with myself and Dr. Pyne, and a newspaper article<sup>14</sup>. Such media offshoots have constituted additional communicative strategies for subsequent projects.



Figure 28

Jane Quon

*The Enemy Below: The Black Striped Mussel  
Invasion of Darwin (1999)*

Performance, video, computer and sound  
Still image from video documentation

An art event based upon Dr. Pyne's Darwin experiences, but presented in Hobart, drew attention to the global nature of a marine pest incursion. It also highlighted particular problems

<sup>14</sup> Pos, M. (1999), 'Artists Draw Attention to Eco Woe', *Mercury, The* (Hobart), 10 August.

facing Tasmania should a similar invasion occur.<sup>15</sup> As a strategy that utilised art as communication, this art event successfully contributed to my wider project.<sup>16</sup>

From conversations I have had as much as two years later with young people who had attended the event, it appears that the impact of *The Enemy Below* upon its audience – and their capacity to take meaning and information from the fast-moving images employed – was considerable. I am keen to return to performance as a major component within some modal mix and to re-deploy the art ‘event’ as a communicative strategy.

## Art Project 2

### *Ecological Manipulations*

At the beginning of my PhD program, in early 1999, my project received a ‘seeding grant’, in which the University of Tasmania agreed to match a \$2000 industry grant under a University/Tasmanian aquaculture industry collaborative research project. The industry support was obtained from the Aquaculture Council of Tasmania.<sup>17</sup>

The exhibition that was the outcome of the Art/Industry partnership, *Ecological Manipulations*, took the form of printmaking and print/installation and was a joint exhibition (though not a collaboration as such) with one other artist. The

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<sup>15</sup> A similar invasion within our own waters would be catastrophic without the advantage of locked marinas (as in Darwin), or if the chemical intervention which was successfully used in Darwin was not available – or approved.

<sup>16</sup> A positive outcome was that the Aquaculture Council of Tasmania requested that *The Enemy Below* be presented a second time, for the general public. The Lord Mayor of Hobart recommended repeat performances over several nights. Video documentation of the event subsequently proved to be of great promotional value. For example, it was instrumental in securing permission for the *Pelagic Projections* project at the international CSIRO *mêtis-Wasted* exhibition in Canberra in 2001 (see Art Project 5, below).

<sup>17</sup> The Art/Industry seeding grant provided the basis for applications for an Australian Research Council Small Grant and, later, a larger SPIRT Grant.



exhibition was held in the Hobart City Council's Carnegie Gallery in October 1999.

The dual aims of the project were to test the potential of the conventional art gallery situation, and the capacity of printmaking,<sup>18</sup> to serve the ecological communication purposes of my project. My artistic aim was to produce images evocative of facets of the marine ecosystem.

In some ways this project developed as a consequence of *The Enemy Below*, some of the print images being taken from this event and reformatted for *Ecological Manipulations*.



Figure 29



Figure 30



Figure 31

Jane Quon

29. *Comb Jelly* (1999)

30. *Jelly Tendril* (1999)

31. *Fish School* (1999)

Inket on canvas

Each image 172cm x 123cm

Original video stills © Mick Baron

*Fish School* (1999), [fig.31] *Jelly Tendril* (1999) [fig.30] and *Comb Jelly* (1999) [fig.29] formed a suite of large-format (123cm x 72cm), computer manipulated images<sup>19</sup>, digitally printed onto canvas. The prime objective of these pieces was to serve as a foil for *It Will Never Be Fished Out* (discussed below). Against the dire message conveyed in the latter print, the clean images of creatures in clear, unpolluted water that comprise this suite serve as reminders of what we stand to lose. At the same time, through the size of these works, surface reflection, suggestions of transparency and ephemerality, along with the enhanced blue of

<sup>18</sup> The art mode to which I was, at the time, primarily committed.

<sup>19</sup> These images were obtained from underwater footage taken by Mick Baron, an underwater videographer, in the waters of the East Coast of Tasmania.

the water, I sought to evoke a sense of the vast expanse of the underwater world: the void and majesty of life beneath the sea.

*Cloisonné Jelly* (1999) [fig.32] and *Hand Fish* (1999) [fig.33] are images digitally printed on canvas. These are images of organisms native to Tasmanian waters and found in places where exotic species have already been sighted.

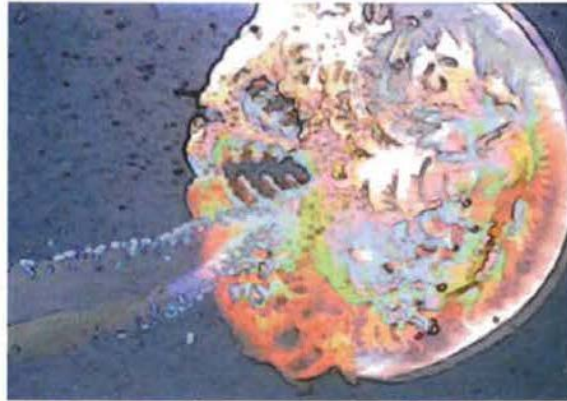


Figure 32

**Jane Quon**  
*Cloisonné Jelly* (1999)  
Inkjet on canvas  
60cm x 110cm  
Original video still © Mick Baron



Figure 33

**Jane Quon**  
*Hand Fish* (1999)  
Inkjet on canvas  
47cm x 65cm  
Original video still © Mick Baron

*Sea of Tranquility - Moon Jelly* (1999) [fig.34] was developed using a four-colour process and screenprinted onto slightly textured Arches 120 gsm paper. I experienced a sense of detachment and remoteness in the digital printing process and was eager to return to the more hands-on tangibility of traditional printmaking. I endeavoured through this process to capture a sensitivity that I felt I could not capture with digital printing. Inspired by the calligrapher's brush, the effect I was seeking to

achieve in the print was that of the soft ink wash suggestive of traditional Chinese or Japanese watercolour. I hoped to convey the delicate transparency, beauty and movement of the jellyfish and to evoke a sense of being under the water.



Figure 34

**Jane Quon**

*Sea of Tranquility - Moon Jelly* (1999)

Screenprint on paper

47cm x 65cm

●original video still © Mick Baron

*Rex Pyne: Total Eradication* (1999), contrasted sharply with *Moon Jelly*. A series of eight prints, each derived from a different still image recorded by a surveillance camera during Rex Pyne's presentation, formed the installation. The individual components, each consisting solely of an image of his face, were single colour screenprints on galvanised steel plate. Included as text in the installation were phrases taken from the script of *The Enemy Below: The Black Striped Mussel Invasion of Darwin*. [fig.35] The face, though repeated, was slightly different in expression in each of the eight elements which made up the work. I sought an allusion to a film strip, the grainy images evoking raw, uncut surveillance footage. Even the open mouth was intended to suggest cinematic movement.

Each image was printed in black onto metal so that the effect was harsh and cold – I wanted no hint of softness in the print. The words 'Total Eradication' and '...But We Had Not Yet

Informed...’, included as text, were intended to express a sense of urgency. Indeed, in ‘real-life’ terms, the dramatic, last-resort chemical warfare regime that Dr. Pyne was forced to implement in Darwin Harbour was an extremely urgent measure. The imposing presence of Dr. Pyne’s head from *The Enemy Below* had remained in my consciousness. I sought to transpose this presence from film onto print.

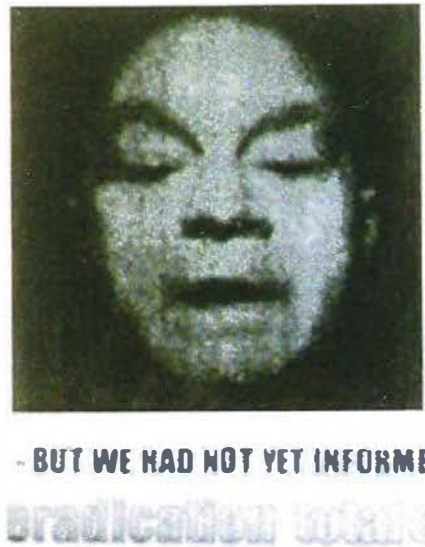


Figure 35

Jane Quon

*Rex Pyne: Total Eradication* detail (1999)

Screenprint on paper

65cm x 47cm

My major piece in the *Ecological Manipulations* exhibition was entitled *It Will Never Be Fished Out* (1999). The title was taken from the Report of the 1893 *Royal Commission into Fishing Practices in Tasmania*, in which precisely that statement was made in reference to the island’s then-prolific rock lobster resource. The prediction proved to be catastrophically inaccurate. So bountiful were rock lobsters at the time of the Report that fishermen actually used them as bait for catching other fish. I employed the phrase, ‘It Will Never Be Fished Out’, as an ironic reference to an all-too-common complacency within fishing practices.

The work serves as a salutary reminder of the outcomes of over-exploitation of aquatic resources and points to the need for fishing



practices that are sustainable. As well as implying the need for heightened social awareness and sound management practices in relation to fishing, the installation also refers to the crucial role of scientific research in the realisation of sustainability and increased stock.



Figure 36

**Jane Quon**

*It Will Never be Fished Out* (1999) detail

Mixed media print

140 x 730 x 45cm (max. d)

●original photograph Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery

The back-lit circular section within each of eight 140 x 160 centimetre panels carries a digitally enhanced microscopic image of *Philosoma*, (the early stage in the life of the rock lobster), [fig.36] while the large black image screenprinted onto the stainless steel in each panel is of a projection microscope. The piece is accompanied by an 'interpretation panel', consisting of a screen-printed reproduced page from the 1893 Royal Commission's Report.

In each of the eight panels, the image of the projection microscope has been screenprinted onto 0.6mm stainless steel and mounted onto 6mm MDF board. Inkjet prints sandwiched between perspex discs and back-lit by halogen globes were suspended on an electrical trapeze. Steel rulers and galvanised steel fittings and cable were additional components of the piece.<sup>20</sup> Each of the eight perspex shelves upon which the panels sat carries, as text, the line: 'It Will Never Be Fished Out'. The text has been created from a computer font, but screenprinted

onto each shelf. Light was projected through the shelf from the gallery track lighting, resulting in the words appearing as a shadow text immediately below the shelf.



Figure 38

**Jane Quon**

*It Will Never Be Fished Out* (1999) detail

Mixed media print

140 x 730 x 45cm (max. d)

The shelves were placed at eye level so that attention would be drawn to the words appearing on the wall under each shelf, rather than to the actual printed words on the shelves themselves. The effect I sought was a sensation of enigma and mystery; a linking of layers from a remembered past to a present crisis, and a sense of foreboding as to what might reside in the future. I also wished to evoke an impression of harshness, this time suggested by the austere, linear black images printed on the cold gunmetal grey steel plate. The microscope images, with their figurative connotations, were portrayed on a larger-than-life scale, the total length of the installation being almost seven metres. The main components of the installation – the eight separate screen-printed panels – were hung above eye level and angled out from the wall at the top. By this means they may seem to loom somewhat threateningly over, and dominate the spectator. [fig.37]

The project revealed limitations that caused me seriously to rethink some of my key assumptions. Attendance at the exhibition averaged 15 people per day over 10 days – approximately 150 visits in total. This constituted a level of visitation that the earlier art event, *The Enemy Below*, exceeded

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<sup>20</sup> This is a complex work, and the finer details of my mode of construction and of the materials deployed are to be found in Appendix 4

in one forty-five minute session. Whilst being satisfied with the artwork for the show, the failure of *Ecological Manipulations* to attract even reasonable audiences meant that, as a project intended to communicate ecological issues to a wide general public, the show was of limited success.

It became clear to me that, to meet the objectives of my project, the conventional gallery setting was inappropriate. For the same reasons, I moved away from printmaking and into visual art modes more appropriate to settings within the public domain. An additional strategy was my deployment of public communications media in order to inform a wider audience of the existence and rationale of my public art events and installations.



Figure 37

Jane Quon  
*It Will Never Be Fished Out* (1999)  
Mixed media print  
140 x 730 x 45cm (max d)

These changes also involved a rethinking of the collaborative relationship with industry. In the art/industry partnership that underwrote *Ecological Manipulations* I was 'encouraged' to use my art as a promotional vehicle for the Tasmanian aquaculture industry. The industry expectations were that the art should

avoid exposing the very problems in the fragile marine ecosystem to which my overall project sought to direct attention. My artistic intention was to express and expose, rather than cover up any unpalatable truths.

### Art Project 3

#### *Ecological Roulette*

*Ecological Roulette* (2000) was a multimedia public art event involving digital imaging, computer animation and sound. It was staged in partnership with Wrest Point Hotel-Casino [fig.39] in early February, 2000. The project was planned as a key event within the Ninth International Conference on Harmful Algal Blooms, held at Wrest Point from February 7-11, 2000, and attended by 400 delegates from 35 countries.



Figure 39

**Jane Quon**

*Ecological Roulette* (2000)  
Conference Centre  
Wrest Point Hotel-Casino  
Sandy Bay, Hobart

*Ecological Roulette* sought to artistically interpret the theme of the scientific conference, and was devised for wide public exposure as well as for presentation to the conference delegates. The conference theme – the ecological threat posed by introduced marine pests – precisely coincided with the ongoing focus of my art. A technical objective was to familiarise myself with the organisation, presentation and promotion of a large public event. In addition to its association with the scientific conference, *Ecological Roulette* coincided with the Hobart City



Council's Summer Festival, and was listed as part of the Festival program.<sup>21</sup>

The work took the form of a large-scale video projection onto the exterior walls of Wrest Point Hotel-Casino's Convention Centre. For the duration of the conference, the same film loop was also projected onto a large screen inside the building. The work comprised digitally-manipulated images derived from video footage and micro-photographs of various marine organisms: some beautiful, some dangerous, some both. It consisted of a seamless fusion of computer-manipulated images interconnected with pre-recorded as well as live video underwater imagery. I juxtaposed full-colour imagery, of (for example) jellyfish and the massively enlarged eye of a tiny seahorse, with similarly enlarged but black and white microscopically-imaged dinoflagellates. Projected onto two of Wrest Point's large white exterior walls, the work was visible in suburbs several kilometres distant. The visually-transformed building with its walls of moving images and light, seemed to take on the nature of an art image in its own right and became as much the focus of audience attention as did the actual images. I did not conceive of the exterior walls merely as neutral 'screens' but as elements in a multi-planar sculptural complex. A sense of overall fluidity was provided by lights which evoked a colour 'wash', and there was an absence of the familiar rectangular film-screen borders. I received assistance from the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, which provided me with an outside broadcast truck and crew for two days, along with the equipment to achieve the lighting design required. Wrest Point Hotel-Casino cut their extensive carpark ambient lighting for the event and painted the larger of the two massive walls to maximise the intensity of the images.

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<sup>21</sup> *Ecological Roulette* was supported by a \$3,200 HCC Community Development Grant.

*Ecological Roulette* reflected my interest in anthropological perspectives on art. My view as to what counts as art is embodied in the ‘seven key functions’ of art defined by Dutch anthropologist A.A. Gerbrands:

... the religious and supernatural, the social prestige value, the play aspect, the aesthetic aspect, the linguistic or communicative function, the technological aspect, and the political function.<sup>22</sup>

Arnold Rubin has been particularly influential in this respect. He has characterised art as the ‘public rituals’ that generate ‘affective response’ within the community. Thus, the Pasadena Tournament of Roses, a traditional (now big-budget) street parade, constitutes in his view a ‘work of art’.<sup>23</sup> I hoped that *Ecological Roulette*, might have fulfilled a similar celebratory function.

The event’s social function was epitomised by the fact that, as well as being created for a large audience in a popular setting, it expressed important social issues. As with the work of Wodiczko and De Gruchy, my work employed the dynamics of large-scale transformation of the familiar, confrontation with the unexpected and the excitement of ‘an event’. Whilst the quality of the artwork itself was a paramount consideration, these other affective dynamics, inherent to the large-scale-public-projection format, were also extremely significant factors. As popular communication, the event demonstrated the potential of the art event as a strategy for realising my research objectives.

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<sup>22</sup> Quoted in Broughton, L.R.P. (1984), ‘What Might Count as Art In Schools’, unpublished M. Ed. Dissertation, University of Tasmania, Hobart (Tas.), p.109.

<sup>23</sup> Rubin, A. (1979), ‘Anthropology and the Study of Art in Contemporary Western Society: The Pasadena Tournament of Roses’, in J. Cordwell, [ed.], *The Visual Arts: Plastic and Graphic*, Moutin, The Hague.



Figure 40

Jane Quon

*Ecological Roulette* (2000)

Wrest Point Conference Centre

Sandy Bay, Hobart

Electron microscope images © Gustaaf Hallegraeff

The Lord Mayor of Hobart launched *Ecological Roulette* on the historic Derwent ferry, *Cartela*, which provided, for 220 scientists and members of the general public, unique vantage points from which to view the artwork on the Casino wall. Original video and photographic imagery for *Ecological Roulette* was provided by CSIRO, the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Dr. Gustaaf Hallegraeff of the Plant Science Department of the University of Tasmania, Karen Gowlett-Holmes, marine biologist and underwater photographer, and Mick Baron, videographer and marine biologist of the Eaglehawk Dive Centre. Southern Cross television advertised the event free of charge over several days, the Hobart *Mercury* ran a feature piece (as well as advertisements) on the event<sup>24</sup>, Wrest Point advertised it in their events column in the same paper, I was interviewed on ABC radio, and the event was included in Summer Festival promotional material. Such wide media promotion of the event was important not only to maximise audience numbers; the promotion itself served as a highly effective vehicle for bringing marine ecology issues to the attention of a very large audience.

*Ecological Roulette* provided another opportunity to test one of my overarching strategic aims – that mutually beneficial relationships may be realised in partnerships between art and science, art and industry, art and corporate and government bodies, and between art and the wider community.

<sup>24</sup> Waterhouse, C. (2000), 'Secrets of the Deep Surface in a Spectacular', *Mercury, The*, (Hobart), 4 February.



Figure 41

Jane Quon

*Ecological Roulette* (2000)

Wrest Point Conference Centre

Sandy Bay, Hobart

● original video image ● Mick Baron

In terms of outcomes, the value of cross-discipline and cross-vocation collaborative relationships was reinforced.<sup>25</sup> This experience also impressed upon me the importance of addressing the issue of introduced marine pests on a more global level. I thus determined to take my work to an international stage, and attempt to reach the people whose decisions bear crucially upon future policies and practices in relation to the marine ecosystem.

<sup>25</sup> Dr. Hallegraef and the conference organisers, the ABC, and Wrest Point Hotel-Casino were all cooperative, considerate and extremely helpful partners. Dr. Meryl Williams of the World Fish Center, Penang, attended the conference, and the renewal of my acquaintance with her resulted in the sealing of a major international collaboration (one that is ongoing). I received an invitation to take *Ecological Roulette* to New Zealand, an invitation I was unfortunately not able to take up. But Rebecca Scott, who was to curate CSIRO's international *métis* exhibition in 2001, heard of *Ecological Roulette*, and contacted me with an invitation to stage a similar event in Canberra at the *métis-Wasted* exhibition. This subsequently transpired, and the project is described below (see Art Project 5). An article on *Ecological Roulette*, by Lindsay Broughton, appeared in the magazine *40° South*, and reached an audience of several thousand readers.

## Art Project 4

### *Ballast Exchange*

I was invited to participate as an artist within an interdisciplinary conference held in Launceston, entitled *Bass Strait Forum 2000*. It was in this context that *Ballast Exchange* (2000) was conceived. The conference sought the input of professionals, managers, the community, industry, academics, historians, policy makers and artists for a three-day symposium on the topic of Bass Strait. The aim of the conference was to initiate dialogue which would lead to improvements in marine environmental planning, assistance for land use planning in the region, exchange of ideas and information, and celebrations of the region's rich and unique cultural history. *Ballast Exchange* was an installation designed and purpose-built for relatively easy dismantling and re-erection. As with *The Enemy Below*, I was attracted to the possibility of deploying my art for communication and broad educational purposes. The intention of my installation was to address issues concerning the biodiversity, sustainability, and general ecological wellbeing of Bass Strait and its many islands.

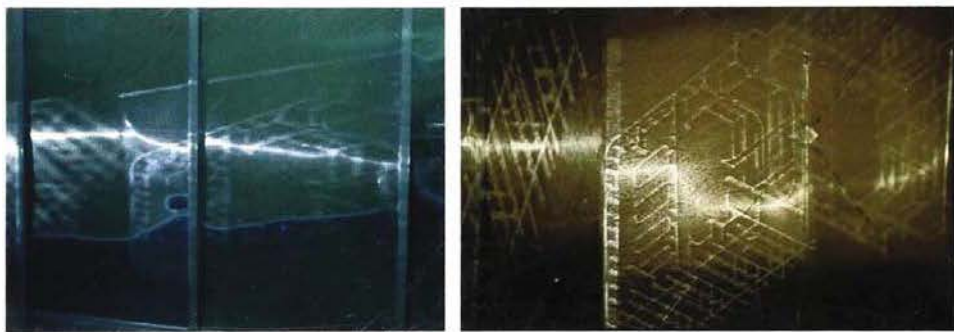


Figure 42

Jane Quon  
*Ballast Exchange* (2000)  
Mixedmedia installation, (details)  
242 x 484 x 242cm

*Bass Strait Forum 2000* was held in 'The Tramsheds', part of the former Inveresk Rail Yards, now transformed into a major Launceston cultural site, from 30 November to 2 December 2000. The event was instigated by a national non-government

organisation, the Marine and Coastal Communications Network (MCCN)<sup>26</sup> and was organised around three themes of significance to Bass Strait. Within the artwork I sought to link all three themes – cultural significance, scientific/natural values and planning/management. The cultural theme of indigenous interaction with Bass Strait has involved significant and difficult issues of cultural and racial continuity. Perhaps the initial cultural impact of European invasion coincided precisely with the beginning of the ecological impact of introduced marine pests upon our waters via the agency of shipping.

The installation was a mixed-media video and sound installation, the major element of which was a ‘shipping container’ made from polystyrene sheets sheathed within shiny aluminium sheeting. [fig.42] Eight stylised images of a ballast tank in cross-section were projected upon the external walls of the container. A sound loop incorporated ‘live’ watery sounds. Inside the ‘container’, two video projections ran on continual loops and were presented on four angled screens. In front of these screens was a tiled glass floor which reflected the images, thus creating an additional screen within the space.

A visual component which connected the two separate films within *Ballast Exchange* was an image of a turning lighthouse prism, layered and fused with images of cables, shackles, chains, underwater life (including images of introduced marine pests), diagrammatic ballast tank cross-sections and Japanese text. The ambient sound within the overall installation space – a large blacked-out hall – comprised an amalgam of recorded natural

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<sup>26</sup> I had already initiated discussions with Christian Bell, Manager of MCCN Tasmania, during the *Ninth Annual Conference on Harmful Algal Blooms* in February 2000 [see above], and with representatives from Queensland’s MCCN and an affiliated body from New Zealand during the Ballast Water Management Symposium held in Brisbane which I attended in 1999 [see above]. I thus knew what MCCN’s aims were, and they were very much in tune with my own, particularly the stress they placed on the need for an integrated approach to environmental management.



sounds which varied in pitch, timbre and volume and which was electronically synthesised to evoke a marine soundscape.

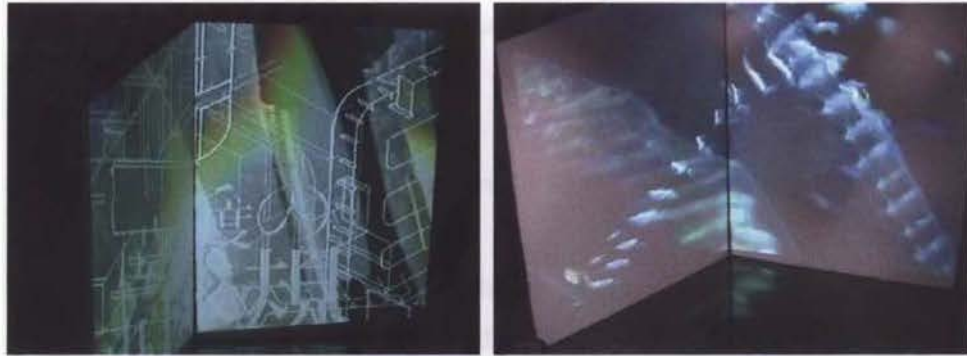


Figure 43

Jane Quon  
*Ballast Exchange* (2000)  
Mixedmedia installation,  
Multimedia sound and video projection (detail)  
242 x 484 x 242cm

Inside the container – and in contrast to these exterior sounds – Russian<sup>27</sup> and English voices, similarly manipulated, spoke the jargon of ballast dumping<sup>28</sup>. These created a more interactive listening environment. The words, sometimes barely discernible, created an antiphonous effect and were interspersed with sounds of shipping dubbed from raw video footage I had previously filmed in Greece and Turkey. In the latter country, I had recorded sound from a large cargo vessel which had been turned on its side, presumably capsized by heavy seas. The recorded sound of welling swells moving in and out of the stricken ship, combined with the metallic creaks and scrapings of the deteriorating vessel, became a major element within this (and subsequent) sound installations.<sup>29</sup>

The lighthouse is simultaneously a symbol of both safety and danger. It has become an archetypal warning sign, and has

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<sup>27</sup> The Russian voice was used because the Red Sea is probably the source of several introduced dinoflagellates (Hallegraeff, G. [2000], Pers. Comm., 14 August).

<sup>28</sup> An example of the phrases included are: invasion risk; hull fouling; global frequency; response strategy; inspection regime; catchment management; international management; international cooperation; risk assessment; survey protocols.

<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of the materials deployed in this installation see Appendix 5.

played a crucial role in the navigation of Tasmanian waters since earliest colonial days, nowhere more so than in the shipwreck-strewn region of Bass Strait. The lighthouse also serves as a metaphor for danger in a more general sense – in this case, the dangers posed by exotic marine pests introduced into Tasmanian waters when dumped in ship ballast water, or when transported from other parts of the world on the hulls of vessels.

The image of the lighthouse prism is presented as a series of overlapping manipulated layers. It is also enigmatic – the light flashes, and it flashes from a near distance. It was my intention that the meaning of the lighthouse imagery would remain ambiguous: whether or not it signified safety or danger would remain an open question. Lindsay Broughton has described the effect thus:

...we do not see the reassuring light of a safely distant, somewhat romanticised lighthouse... [It] is a dramatic close-up. We see nothing of a lighthouse building as such; it is as if we are blinded by its intense flashing light. And if we are located so close to the light, then we are, by inference, so close to the danger of which it warns that it may even be too late for us. The image's lack of specificity immediately confers upon it greater ambiguity...<sup>30</sup>

The lighthouse image was also used by W.C. Piguenit (1836-1914) in his romantic realist painting in water-colour and gouache, *The Tower of Strength* (c1900). [fig.44] In a catalogue essay, Hobart curator, Romy Wall, has described the metaphoric effect of the lighthouse in this painting:

...against the power and the majesty of the ocean The Tower of Strength (the lighthouse) is but a tiny speck on a barren headland dwarfed by the foam-crested, translucent green waves and the rugged, seaweed covered rocks onto which they break. The picture is a poet's delight but a navigator's nightmare. It brings to mind images of the dangerous seduction of the Sirens, whose sweet singing lured ships' crews to their doom of jagged rocks.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Broughton, L.R.P., (2001) 'Pelagic Space', Catalogue essay in *mêtis 2001:Wasted, Exhibitions of Science and Art*, National Science Week, May, Canprint, Canberra (ACT), pp 68-71.

<sup>31</sup> W.C.Piguenit found his inspiration in the power and beauty of nature. *The Tower of Strength* [c1900] is part of the collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. This excerpt is taken from the exhibition catalogue, Wall, R. (1997), *Sea: Maritime Treasures from the Collection of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery*. 28<sup>th</sup> Nov.





Figure 44

**WC Pigenit [1836-1914]**  
*The Tower of Strength* (c1900)  
 Watercolour and gouache  
 35.7cm x 56cm

Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart

I endeavoured to convey a similar impression to Pigenit's within my work, but I sought to do this by foregrounding the image of the lighthouse. The lighthouse, the shackle, the chain, are all suggestive of danger and all are man-made. Alerted to that lighthouse's warning, we exercise vigilance. In *Ballast Exchange* these images are juxtaposed against images from the natural marine world. They set up a tension between the sensual and the sinister, evoking the often catastrophic interface between ecosystem and humanity.

Just as the lighthouse has a symbolic function, so does the shipping container. It is intended to stand for the enormity of all that is transported by sea across the world. It is the vessels which carry these containers, constantly plying the oceans of the world, that are the major means by which exotic and dangerous pests are transported into Australian marine ecosystems.

I have been encouraged in the deployment of the shipping container within my artwork by considering the way in which photographer, Allan Sekula, has utilised the container as an image in his project, *Fish Story* (1996).

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1997-4<sup>th</sup> Jan 1998, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart (Tas.), picture 132 (np).



Figure 45

**Allan Sekula**

*Containers used to contain shifting sand dunes (1994)*

Veracruz

Photograph size unknown

Sekula conceives of the shipping container as a material symbol of the concept of 'globalisation'. 'Today', he writes, 'containers are the ubiquitous material symbol of Asia'.<sup>32</sup> *Fish Story* provides an allegorical insight into the decline of the maritime industry as a site of romantic seafaring. [fig.45]

Within the shipping industry, the container is seen as the crucial element in a functional ensemble, submitting all other machines to its rule. 'The container', Sekula writes, 'must be viewed as a vehicle of transportation and the ship itself only as an underlying carrier, or... merely as a form of locomotion for the container'.<sup>33</sup> I elected to use the container as the central image for *Ballast Exchange* as a metaphor for the purely commercial function of shipping, concerned as it is with the efficient transportation of merchandise. Such a function sharply contrasts, ontologically, with the rich network of life that inhabits that element – water – over which the container moves.

My conception of how the 'container' might appear as an image was influenced by the highly-transformative effects of

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<sup>32</sup> Sekula, A. (1996), *Fish Story*, Richter Verlag, Düsseldorf, p 135. Sekula's deployment of the container as a vector of globalisation opens up interesting lines of thought on the question of agency within globalisation more generally. Reluctantly these matters are beyond the scope of the present investigation. Those who are interested should consult Wark (1994).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p136.

Wodizcko's projection upon buildings. With my multiple projections onto the 'container' in *Ballast Exchange*, I sought to 'de-materialise' the form of the structure, utilising the shiny aluminium surfaces as screens for my own overlapping projected images. I sought a somewhat ethereal, spectral image, yet one bounded by the still-familiar form of the ubiquitous container. Like Wodizcko, I wanted my image to persist in the mind of the viewer and for the image of the 'container' to take on an occluded existential dimension. Importantly, I wanted the viewer to retain the memory of my work's theme – the harmful practices of ballast dumping.

There were some deficiencies. To project within the 'container' itself was difficult as there was little room for equipment. (This could be resolved in the future by the use of mirrors to facilitate projection from above). Most equipment was hired for the art event. Some, brought in at the last moment during installation, was not identical to the equipment I had used in Hobart whilst devising the work, and this resulted in compatibility problems. The project proved to me yet again the imperative of building up one's own arsenal of equipment.

In respect of outcomes, the three-minute 'promo' developed from this project has since proved extremely effective as a device to communicate my project to potential collaborators within industry and science.<sup>34</sup>

## **Art Project 5**

### ***Pelagic Projections***

*Pelagic Projections* (2001) was a part of *mêtis-Wasted*, a set of separate simultaneous exhibitions staged in Canberra in May 2001 during National Science Week. The exhibitions explored synergies between art and science. Initiated and coordinated by

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<sup>34</sup> This documentary film of '*Ballast Exchange*' is included in the DVD that accompanies this exegesis as part of the documentation for my submission, and associated material is included in the hard copy folio.

CSIRO, separate components of *mêtis-Wasted* were presented in various galleries and other public venues throughout the National Capital. The event provided an opportunity to develop further the art/science links that had become central to my art praxis.<sup>35</sup>

My contribution to *mêtis-Wasted* was presented at the National Science and Technology Centre – Questacon – the site for which my work was, subsequently, specifically devised. A sound and video installation, *Pelagic Projections* provided an excellent opportunity to develop some of the methods employed in both *Ecological Roulette* and *Ballast Exchange*. The work involved separate large-scale video projections, one onto the façade, the other in the foyer of the Questacon building. The interior component consisted of a three-screen sound and video installation, while a large-scale video-with-sound projection was created for the outside of the building. The external projection consisted of the films from *Ballast Exchange*.

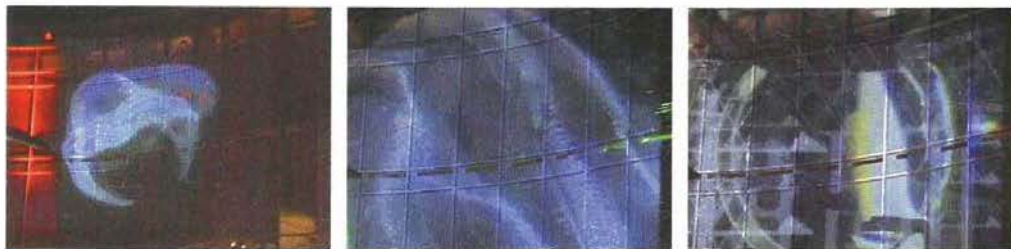


Figure 46

**JaneQuon**

*Pelagic Projection* (2001)

Still images from exterior projection

National Science and Technology Centre

● Questacon, Canberra

● original video stills © Mick Baron

<sup>35</sup> This project provided an opportunity to extend what I had already learned about the staging of an art event at Wrest Point Hotel-Casino with *Ecological Roulette*. I travelled to Canberra twice in connection with *mêtis-Wasted*. The first occasion was to discuss with Questacon personnel and the curator (CSIRO's Rebecca Scott), Questacon as an exhibition site, and to explore potential specific locations within it. Though I had been invited to present an event at the launch of the exhibition, I needed to conclude negotiations and confirm my involvement. I showed the *Ballast Exchange* promo and the video documentary of *The Enemy Below* (see DVD documentation). The *mêtis* exhibitions create a synergy between artistic expression and science, merging the boundaries between the disciplines and highlighting the benefits of collaboration between the arts and the sciences.



In the foyer the three films were projected onto separate viewing areas, and could be seen from many vantage points.

The *mêtis* exhibitions curator, Rebecca Scott, was committed to bringing together international artists known for their operating at the cusp of science.<sup>36</sup> My own contribution to the exhibition was developed over the course of a year. In addition to creating the work itself, I was involved in visits to Canberra, negotiating aspects related to presenting the work in the venue, equipment availability and hire and many additional logistical considerations<sup>37</sup>.



Figure 47

Jane Quon  
*Pelagic Projection* (2001)  
Still image from exterior projection  
National Science and Technology Centre  
Questacon, Canberra

My initial plan was to make screens which would be suspended across the interior diameter of the central architectural core of the building at various levels. Images projected onto a scrim could be viewed from above and below, where both my exhibition and the *mêtis-Wasted* launch were planned to take place. It was my intention to create within this environment a

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<sup>36</sup> The many environmentally-focussed artists exhibited at *mêtis-Wasted 2001* included Robert Gschwantner.

<sup>37</sup> Though such considerations do not constitute 'artistic' work as such, they are nonetheless time-consuming (and expensive) necessities to be attended to if one is to present work in non-gallery settings within the public domain. Indeed, they are the factors which ultimately determine a work's very existence, at least in its intended form.

space reminiscent of the deep diving experience discussed in Chapter 1.



Figure 48

National Science and Technology Centre  
Questacon, Canberra

A combination of options was discussed and considered for exterior projection, and appropriate site photographs were taken. Personnel changes within Questacon's organisation, however, led to changes in programming. This necessitated a reconceptualisation of the Questacon building in terms of projection possibilities. The video artworks specifically made to suit the interior of the drum were subsequently projected instead within the foyer of the building.

The video projections onto the building's exterior comprised the films presented during *Ballast Exchange*. [fig.49] These were originally intended for projection onto the exterior surface of the round central core of the building – or 'drum' – the highest point of the building and a feature that may be seen from distant vantage points across Canberra. [fig.47-48] Though I conducted test projections onto the Drum, my original intentions were logistically constrained: all my technical requirements were not obtained due to personnel changes in the organisation. Last minute changes needed to be made, and I projected instead onto the curved glass façade of the building's main entrance.



Figure 49

**Jane Quon**

*Pelagic Projections* (2001)

Exterior Projection,

Film stills from *Ballast Exchange* (2000)

National Science and Technology Centre

Questacon, Canberra

Original video stills © Mick Baron

The work presented within the Questacon foyer was created as a multiple projection piece. I experimented with three screens, each of which would be created individually and be able to function independently, but so designed as to work in relation to the others. Images produced would intersect and become interconnected, but could still be viewed as a seamless whole. The creative aspects I wished to develop arose in my previous video projection from the chance interplay created through the juxtaposition of images. Within the films made for *Pelagic Projections* a highly stylised jellyfish form moved from the right screen to the left. This became the device used to connect the individual screens. Images folded back, separating to reveal an added dimension of size to the central screen or, alternatively, they rolled in from the edges, producing imagery which was



Figure 50

**Jane Quon**

*Pelagic Projections* (2001)

Still image from 'Three in One' documentation

National Science and Technology Centre

Questacon, Canberra

inextricably linked, finally forming a single image which stretched the width of the three screens. At times the screens were devoid of any imagery.

I refilmed *Ballast Exchange* and used this as a textural background for the three screens.<sup>38</sup> Other images were sourced from marine life and from maritime industries. These included shackles and ropes from ships and images of decay, rust, detritus. I intended to further extend the use of sound in this work. I added various European and Asian voices to the Russian voice which formed a component of the *Ballast Exchange* films, in order to evoke the global nature of the ballast water dumping problem. It was also my intention to make reference to current practices within the shipping industry in Tasmania, at the same time linking to a global domain. A key element in *Pelagic Projections* was the diagrammatic linear imagery of 'spinning boats'.<sup>39</sup> [fig.51] These forms turned slowly upon themselves at first, but the original two eventually became five, the whole interwoven with sound building frenetically as the boats turned more quickly. Within this sequence, it was my intention to evoke a sense of a churning, driving mechanism; giant pistons throbbing, driving on relentlessly until the cacophany became so

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<sup>38</sup> The equipment used in this project is detailed in Appendix 6.

I should note, here, however, that the bane of this project was again my reliance (a long way from home) on strange equipment and on the expertise of others in its use. Again, the need for an installation artist to have confidence – which means the control that equipment ownership confers – over his/her tools and technologies was confirmed for me. In a personal communication, prominent Australian projection artist Ian De Gruchy has stressed this need, and I now know him to have been right (2001, Pers. Comm.). The difficulties of the Qwestacon space/s, along with the logistical/technological difficulties, constitute the negative outcomes of *Pelagic Projections*. I know that an installation artist working with non-art collaborators and unpredictable equipment must be flexible, and must always have fallback strategies. In retrospect, I am pleased with the way I responded to the last minute crises in this project. Difficulties notwithstanding, I felt that the external projection worked well. And, given that the internal films were designed to be presented seamlessly, yet were not projected in the way that I would have desired, and given that the foyer was an extremely difficult space in which to present, I felt that the internal projection worked as well as I could have expected.



oppressive as to be almost intolerable. The relentless and impersonal nature of the imagery was also intended to evoke dispassionate human intrusion into the marine ecosystem: a remorselessness and an absence of sensitivity.

The oppressive visual and aural experience of the 'spinning boats' cuts to the similarly frenetic screen-wide imagery of the highly magnified underbelly of the voraciously-feeding invasive North Pacific starfish. Again, I have sought to convey the sense of a relentless, machine-like intruder – albeit, in this instance, a biological one – wreaking destruction upon the undersea environment. To heighten the sense of oppression the creature is shown in huge full-screen close-up, and its feeding motion is accelerated to evoke an impression of frenzy. The film then cuts abruptly to the single centre screen and the eye of a sea-horse. This is an 'all-seeing' eye; it is innocent, poignant, benign, with the status of a silent witness. It is a metaphor for the marine ecosystem *in toto*, perhaps standing as testament to its own destruction. But the image is accompanied by the sound of a single drawn-out blast that, in the context of shipping, signifies an intention to move right and forward. It is thus possible to see the film as concluding optimistically, a potential reading reinforced by the images of the tiny microscopic creatures that flourish within a healthy marine environment that recur as filmic microcosms within the larger film.

A five minute film which documents my presentation of *Pelagic Projections* has been made, along with additional documentation demonstrating how the seamlessly integrated multiple-screen films were intended to be experienced within the Questacon foyer (see DVD documentation 'Three in One'). The project also proved the value of my networking strategies: *Pelagic Projections* led to my being asked by CSIRO's Marine Division

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<sup>39</sup> A component of the film was wire-frame engineering images of two cargo ships that ply between Tasmania and overseas – the *Bell Bay* and *Mobil Australis*.

to be part of a (subsequently successful) grant application for a 2002 National Science week art/science collaboration in Hobart (see Art Project 7).

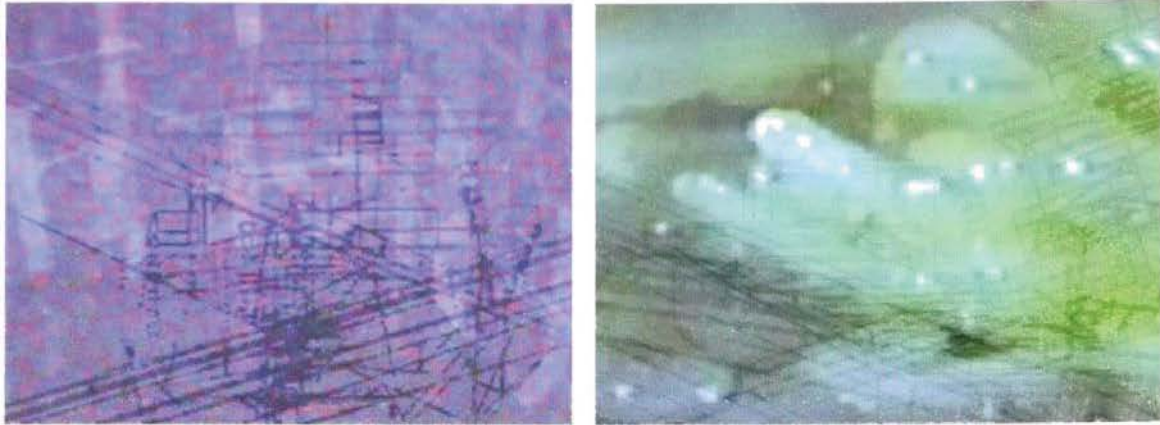


Figure 51

**Jane Quon**

*Pelagic Projections* (2001)

Still images from central screen video

National Science and Technology Centre

Questacon, Canberra

Prior to the making of *Pelagic Projections* I resolved to experiment with elements such as the still images of Japanese text, as used in the *Ballast Exchange* film, and to develop the written word as a moving image. The opportunity for this did not arise until the making of *Marine Incursion*.

## **Art Project 6**

### ***Marine Incursion***

In June 2000 I attended the Marine Environment Protection Council's (MEPC) annual meeting in London. Here I met the senior personnel of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and began negotiations for presenting artwork at 'MEPC 47' in 2002. The ballast water problem is an international issue; thus dealing with the problem requires international action. Such action occurs principally through the activities of the IMO and MEPC.

One of the key strategies that the IMO seeks to develop is public education, both formal and non-formal, which it deems critical in providing the community with the capacity to address issues of environmental concern. Public education is also crucial for the development of community values, skills, behavioural habits and environmental awareness conducive to sustainable development. It is in this context that I successfully argued a case for the inclusion of an art presentation and installation at the IMO's 2002 Conference, something that had never happened before within the organisation.

*Marine Incursion* (2002) is the result. A video installation that focuses upon the current dire condition of the world's seas, *Marine Incursion* was made for a single screen with stereo sound, for viewing within a typical theatrette.

The targeted audience for *Marine Incursion* consisted of the key personnel involved in making global policy in respect of ballast water dumping. It would be impossible to reach an audience more senior in the decision-making chain. I wished to bridge the gap between my art and this high-powered but idiosyncratic audience by incorporating elements with which they would be familiar: visual references to shipping, for example, and modalities such as text and human voice. Text and voice presented a challenge: how to use text without giving the impression of credits, or subtitles, and how to use voice in a way that was integral to, and seamless within the artwork rather than its suggesting an externally-imposed commentary.

The work involved collaboration with other artists, notably a poet and an actor. (This is still a work in progress and it is anticipated that artists in other media will be involved in later stages.) Although the overall artistic vision of the project remained my own, the collaborators were full contributors and not simply hired hands. A poem was especially devised for this project, entitled 'The Old Mind and the Sea' (see Appendix 7).

It was written by Peter Hay, in his guise as a widely published Tasmanian poet in whose work ecological themes are overt. His writings on ecological thought have been influential in the construction of my own ideas.

Before he commenced the poem I talked to Dr. Hay about my underwater experiences, about the role and function of MEPC and the IMO, and about the ecology of oceans generally. An admirer of Rachel Carson's classic writings on the ecology of oceans<sup>40</sup>, Hay's poem evokes the ocean as a living entity. The poem contains a clear antiphony, a call and response that is a metaphoric shadow of the ebb and flow of the tide. One of the allusions that ebbs and flows through his poem is the irresistible, primal tug of the ocean on the human mind, an evocation of the 'movement of the mind' dynamic that my project as a whole seeks to effect.

In the video, prominent Tasmanian actor/director John Hale provided the voice. His collaboration, like Hay's, formed an integral part of the work's development. In his interpretation of the poem, Hale responded to its back and forth rhythm. I wanted the voice, as distinct from the actual words spoken by the voice, to suggest a disembodied atavistic conscience. A recurring visual image is that of a human figure seemingly trapped and struggling within a net. I conceived this as a metaphor for the ocean itself, striving to free itself of the constraining bonds that human activities impose upon it.

A mooring rope is another component of the visual structure of the video. As well as the rope serving as a familiarising device for the specialist maritime audience, it may be seen to signify connecting of land and water, the water's surface and the world below the water, and human intrusion into the marine domain.

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<sup>40</sup> Carson, R. (1951), *The Sea Around Us*, Panther, London; Carson, R. (1968), *The Sea*, MacGibbon and Kee, London.



However, the intended metaphoric function of the rope goes beyond this. I conceived the rope, in fact, as a device which stood for the connection of the visceral to the cognitive, and of sensation to thought. It serves, I hope, as a device that leads the immediate, pre-rational artistic impulse to a conscious analysis of issues of marine ecology. I hoped that *Marine Incursion* would serve to link artist and environmental decision-maker.



Figure 52

**Jane Quon**  
*Marine Incursion* (2002)  
Movie still  
Duration 9min.

I consider that two positive outcomes emerged from this project. The first was that a successful art presentation was able to be made at a prestigious international conference of high-level marine environment decision-makers. The second was that the project enabled me to discuss with scientists, industrialists and



Figure 53

**Jane Quon**  
*Marine Incursion* (2002)  
Movie still  
Duration 9min.

policy makers my intention to utilise art as a medium to communicate broad environmental and social issues.

The video of *Marine Incursion* has since been presented within a public forum on art and environment in Hobart in May, 2002 and also at the Environment, Culture and Community Conference in Brisbane in July 2002.

As a strategy, this work has the advantage of portability that more complex installations, even when demountable, do not possess. It could also be adapted to conventional television programming.

## **Art Project 7**

### ***We Engage With Invisible Tides***

*We Engage with Invisible Tides...*(2002) was a semi-permanent sculptural installation partially-to-fully submerged (depending on the tide) in Waterman's Dock, Hobart. The sculpture was assembled during *Science in Salamanca*, a science/arts festival held during National Science Week 2002. Collaborating partners were CSIRO and Hobart Ports, with in-kind support provided by the University of Tasmania.<sup>41</sup> The project brought together several of Hobart's major cultural, scientific and marine-environmental policy stakeholders.

Waterman's Dock is located within Sullivan's Cove – Hobart's port and the city's major tourist and pedestrian precinct. As such, the site provided the most strategic location for my installation.

Furthermore, at no other site within the Cove is the passer-by in more intimate proximity to the water. Thus the sculpture was viewed by a great many people – including school and university

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<sup>41</sup> A National Science Week grant of \$3000 covered the cost of materials, with Q-Ecology providing matching support. Pasminco supplemented the grant with \$700 for the sculpture's computer-generated design and for catalogue printing costs.

students specifically brought to view the work – over the three-week duration of its installation. The work's physical setting – in water – carried symbolic significance, water constituting such an intrinsically ecological<sup>42</sup> element. In the water, my work shared aquatic space with the introduced North Pacific Seastar (*Asterias amurensis*), and with a small school of fingerlings which made of my installation a temporary home.

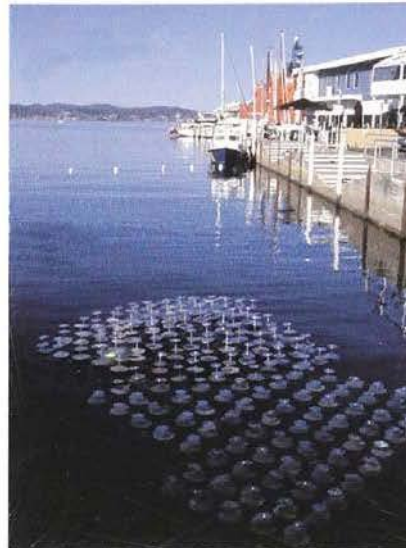


Figure 54

**JaneQuon**

*We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002)

Mixed-media Marine Installation

Waterman's Dock, Hobart.

(h) variable (28 x 120cm) 420 x 450cm

The sculpture consisted of a steel-framed grid in three sections offset from each other and sunk within Waterman's Dock about 1.5 metres below the mid-tide surface. One hundred and fifty untreated steel boiler rods were vertically attached to the three grid-frames, with laser-cut aluminium discs of varying diameters – and totalling 500 in number – fixed at different distances from the tops of the rods, with the largest discs at the lowest level. The overall form of the sculpture – a flowing wave effect – was

<sup>42</sup> In assessing this piece, I derive satisfaction from the sense that I have returned whence I started – to the issue of introduced marine pests on my own doorstep. It gives me added satisfaction because I consider this to be a truly 'ecological' piece, both in terms of its meeting my own 'ecological' criteria, and its interaction with the natural elements of the particular marine ecosystem.

created by cutting vertical rods at different lengths. [fig.55] The constant variations which played upon the sculpture – of tidal level, light, wind, rain and current – constantly changed the nature of the viewing experience.



Figure 55

**Jane Quon**

*We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002)

Mixed-media Marine Installation

Waterman's Dock, Hobart

(h) variable (28 x 120cm) 420 x 450cm

Light and the ebb and flow of the tide were key considerations in the conceptualisation of the installation. Elements of the metal fabrication reflected and refracted light, both natural and artificial, the latter by means of a light installed underwater, as well as, at night, by the abundant ambient lighting provided within the precinct. The fabric of the installation was treated in order to produce different ambient lighting effects, whilst tidal flows also altered the visual impact. My intent was to convey a sense of perceptual fluidity between the sculpture and its ever-changing environment – in effect, to present a 'different' sculpture at different times of the day and from different viewpoints around the dock apron. I sought to create an underwater installation that met my own ecological criteria for public art (as described in earlier chapters) and which conveyed a sense of the living complexity of the estuarine ecology<sup>43</sup>. The project sought to foster an awareness of the Derwent estuary's

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<sup>43</sup> An artwork such as this leaves itself open to any manner of 'idiosyncratic' or 'accidental' readings, and though a matter that I would like to investigate in the future, there is no capacity to explore this issue here.



ecologically-crucial microfauna. Yet the work itself was non-didactic in terms of content, and non-representational in form.

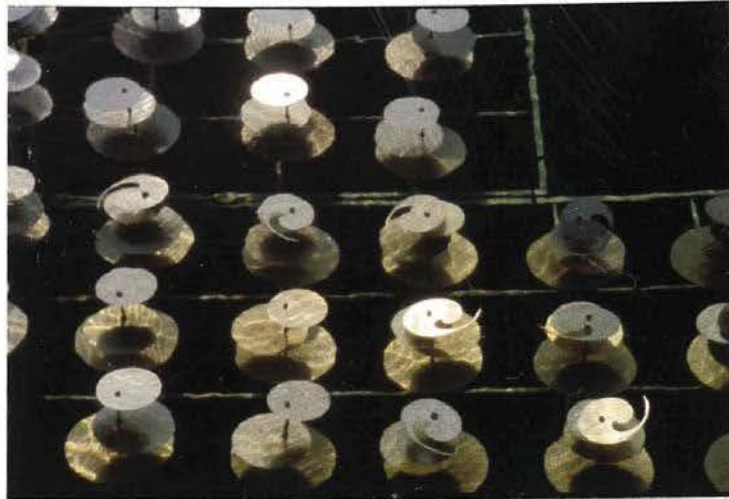


Figure 56

Jane Quon

*We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002)

Mixed-media Marine Installation

Waterman's Dock, Hobart

(h) variable (28 x 120cm) 420 x 450cm

The rods were flexible enough to move with the current, while the changes in lighting on the water's surface provided myriad formal variations on the piece as a whole. At high tide the installation was entirely submerged; at low tide most discs were above the surface. The installation also assumed a different dimension at night, when the 400w submerged light took greater effect, and accentuated the green algal bloom that was present in the dock at the time.<sup>44</sup> The lights were designed to emit minimal heat.

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<sup>44</sup> The installation was created in a computer design program, Cinema 4D (Mathew Weame Design). In addition to CSIRO and Hobart Ports, I consulted with an architect, a public art consultant and a metal fabricator (Bevan Rees, Yvonne Rees-Pagh and Bow-Tie Engineering respectively). The grid was constructed off-site in three sections to enable easy transportation. It was spray-painted in a metallic colour, though differentially graded to suggest the coruscations of fish flanks. The rods were measured to different lengths, and attached to the grid with small nuts and washers, as were the discs to the rods. The rods and discs were cut, and the installation assembled, off-site. Preliminary tests were carried out on-site before the final design was determined. Matters of design, even matters of fine detail, had to be established with precision in advance. The weight, size of the discs, the nature of the seabed, the dimensions to be given to the fabricator – even tidal

My concept was for the elements within the work to convey different allusions to the living nature of the estuary, and of human interaction with it. In his catalogue essay, Dr. Peter Hay writes:

The artist's deployment of a gridded substructure suggests rigidity, certainty... the geometry that expresses the imprisonment of nature/space is the grid, and it is brutal in its contempt for natural patterns, for biophysical intricacy, for the flexibility that attends an other-regarding humility.<sup>45</sup>

And of the rods and discs he writes:

Unruly elements. Symbols of resistance, they signify the movement, the intangibility, the elusiveness of nature – and the elusiveness of our knowing of it... we are reminded that our triumph over nature is uneasy – hollow and temporary.<sup>46</sup>



Figure 57

**Jane Quon**

*We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002)

Mixed-media Marine Installation

Waterman's Dock, Hobart

(h) variable (28 x 120cm) 420 x 450cm

A work such as this, exposed within a powerfully modifying, unpredictable natural environment, encourages a somewhat humble conception of the artist's role. My installation, for example, acquired a patina of algae, and its metal components began visibly to deteriorate. Unplanned 'aesthetic qualities' appeared and disappeared, in the same way that Andy Goldsworthy's photographs reveal such qualities – or 'moments' – in the lives of his transient environmental installations.

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patterns – all had to be known in advance. There was no scope for trial and error at the point of installing the work.

<sup>45</sup> Hay, P. (2002), 'We Engage With Invisible Tides...', catalogue essay in *Art: Eco-Ecology*, self-published, Hobart, np.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

I felt that *We Engage With Invisible Tides...* possessed an 'ecological' fluidity, a poetic element that was not achieved in my earlier projects. In a philosophical sense, I considered my relationship to the work to have embodied ecological principles, akin to a collaboration with nature itself. Further, the nature and placement of this work served to subordinate the status of myself as artist, elevating the work instead. Paradoxically, I found this relative anonymity liberating, appropriate to the ecological intent of my project.

### **The Submission**

My final submission consists of various art projects. Some are presented in their more-or-less fully realised form. These are *It Will Never Be Fished Out* (1999), *Ballast Exchange* (2000), *Pelagic Projections* (2001), *Marine Incursion* (2002) and *We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002). Other works are presented in the form of documentation. The *Ballast Exchange* film is submitted as a separate item. The three films which comprise *Pelagic Projections* are documented as one. In the case of the art projects, *The Enemy Below* (1999) and *Ecological Roulette* (2000) respectively, slide and film documentation is provided on DVD, along with additional film and slide documentation of *Pelagic Projections*. The individual screen and digital prints included in my exhibition, *Ecological Manipulations*, are included as components of the research documentation. With the exception of *We Engage With Invisible Tides...*, it has not been possible to present the artworks in the physical and social contexts for which they were originally devised, and, given that 'site' has constituted an important factor in influencing the nature of many of the artworks, their presentation in the context of my submission is less than optimal. I am, however, satisfied with the Dechaineux Theatre and the two venues made available

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by Hobart Ports<sup>47</sup>, but it has not been possible to present the print, *It Will Never be Fished Out*, in such a way that the back-lighting could not be seen. Collectively, however, these works provide a comprehensive representation of the various modes of visual communication employed during the research, and the range of collaborations, venues and audiences that I have sought to involve.

In producing documentation of my research I have attempted to convey the ways in which the research has unfolded. In addition, I have aimed to provide, through DVD, a general understanding of the nature of the art projects that have comprised my research. In some cases, such as the events in Canberra and London, where personnel were not available to document my presentations, this has been difficult.

The Conclusion that follows provides a summary of the central concerns of this research and its contribution to the field.

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<sup>47</sup> Two venues, Waterman's Dock and Princes Wharf No. 2 Shed, have been made available by Hobart Ports for my submission, a testament to the extent of their collaborative commitment to the projects.



## Conclusion

In my introduction I advanced seven propositions that would be tested in this research. Several of these focused upon the communicative function of art: its capacity to influence values, promote awareness and inspire action leading to social change. I argued that art is a unique way of knowing, a visual language with a potential for conceptualising and representing social issues generally, and ecological issues specifically. I advanced a view of art that asserted its historical function in respect of cultural formation and its potential to serve as a vehicle for social change.

During my research I have completed several projects which have involved various artistic modes, strategies and contexts for the presentation of my works. Each project has opened up new possibilities for the next, not only in terms of artistic development, but also in the way that each has brought to light new human contacts and possible new sites for subsequent works. In each project, my own subjective visceral responses to the natural world has been transposed into the objective cognitive organisation of a work of art. It has been my aim that each piece might evoke affective responses in viewers which could, in turn, contribute to a widespread paradigm shift in public attitudes toward the marine environment. Immediate public responses to my various artworks have been highly encouraging in this respect.

My fourth proposition states that 'partnerships and collaborations between artists working in different modes, and between artists and scientists, decision-makers and scholars from other disciplines, can provide the synergies which will most effectively deliver the change potential of art'. My research has emphatically demonstrated the validity of this proposition. I have discussed the complexities that may arise in the collaborative process, but I

have also argued that, even when problems occur, the artistic outcome can still transcend shortcomings. When the collaboration is successful in every respect, the artistic output not only gives great satisfaction, but the collaboration itself constitutes a positive outcome, evoking as it does the very spirit of an ecological art praxis.

In terms of the concept of ecological art which I advance, the natural world itself becomes a significant shaping factor. It becomes, in effect, a virtual collaborator in the artistic process. The sense of affinity between art and nature achieved in my final piece (*We Engage With Invisible Tides...*) also confirms the importance of presenting my works in non-gallery public venues.

Another proposition advanced is that the new art media 'have particular potential in regard to the communicative potential of art... because such artistic modes have a greater capacity to speak meaningfully to a wider public'. In reference to this proposition, I have experimented with various visual modes, seeking to ascertain their relative communicative potential. I consider my final piece, the sculptural installation, *We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002), to have been the most successful in this respect. The interaction of this work with its marine environment is direct and immediate; commensurately, my own witnessing has revealed that the work serves to direct viewers' attention quite substantially to the water within which it is sited. The environment itself, in fact, becomes an inherent aesthetic element. The perceived success of this sculptural installation has not depended upon 'new (ie, electronic) media'. Nevertheless, other works which have involved new media – in multi-screen and large-scale projections on buildings and other large outdoor settings – have also been highly effective as communication vehicles. Such works have demonstrated for me the potential of

video as a medium with considerable social reach and affective impact.

The links which I have established with industry have been numerous and central to the research. The most significant such link is my ongoing collaborative project with the World Fish Center, in Penang, Malaysia, a partnership which involves the production of numerous artworks based upon marine ecology themes. Research for some of these works will take me to the Mekong Delta in Vietnam, where I will be working alongside World Fish Center scientists in education programs aimed at the realisation of sustainable food programs in the lower Mekong fishery.

This research has investigated the potential of art effectively to highlight various issues pertaining to the marine environment, the most prominent being the environmental impact of ballast dumping. During the research I have utilised various strategies and artistic modes to this end. Despite logistical difficulties in some cases, the various projects and the responses to them have realised the research objectives of effectively communicating marine-ecological issues through the agency of art. I intend further to explore the potential of new-media art projections, marine installations and the art event using cross-disciplinary collaborative models.



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**Chapter 1**  
**Background Influences**

*Figure 1*  
**Anish Kapoor**  
*Adam*, (1998-89)  
Sandstone and pigment  
119x102x236cm  
Collection Tate Gallery, London

**Chapter 2**  
**Art, Values, and Social Change**

*Figure 2*  
**Leonardo da Vinci**  
*Cartoon for the Virgin and Child with St. Anne* (c1500)  
Charcoal on paper  
137x107cm  
National Gallery, London

*Figure 3*  
**Karel Appel**  
*Woman with Head* (1964)  
185 x 225cm  
oil on canvas

*Figure 4*  
**John Glover**  
*Mills Plains* (c1832-34)  
Oil on canvas  
72.26 x 151.9cm  
collection: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart

*Figure 5*  
**Peter Dombrovskis**  
*Morning Mist, Rock Island Bend* (1983)  
24 x 19cm  
photograph on 5x4 ektrachrome E6 film

*Figure 6*  
**Joseph Beuys**  
*7,000 Oaks* (1982)  
Photograph taken of the first planted oak  
on the Friedrichsplatz in Kassel,  
documenta 7, 1982 by Ute Klophaus

*Figure 7*

**Krzysztof Wodiczko**

Onto Hirshhorn Museum,

Washington DC

Projection

<http://www.art-for-change.com/Krzysztof/Krzy.ttm>

*Figure 8*

**Shirin Neshat**

*Speechless*, (1996)

B/W RC print and ink

Photographer: Barry Larns

*Figure 9*

**Shirin Neshat**

Stills from *Rapture* (1999)

16mm film transferred to DVD,

shown on 2 facing screens,

13 minute loop

*Figure 10*

**Jenny Holzer**

From *Arno* (1967-97)

185mm Kodaklit-film Xenon projection

Dimensions variable

Project, Arno river, 'Biennale de Firenze: il tempo e la Moda',

Florence, 1996

### Chapter 3

#### Ecological Principles for Art Practice

*Figure 11*

**Peter Dombrovskis**

*Lower Franklin Below Jane River* (1983)

21 x 17cm

*Figure 12*

**Nicole Newley**

*Example of Living* (2001)

Oil on canvas

100 x 68cm

## Chapter 4

### Art and Ecology

#### *Figure 13*

**J.M.W. Turner**

*Snow Storm – Steam Boat off a Harbour's Mouth making Signals in Shallow Water, and going by the Lead. The Author was in this Storm on the night the Ariel left Harwich* (1842)

Oil on canvas

91.4x121.9cm

Tate Gallery, London

#### *Figure 14*

**Frederic Edwin Church** (1826-1900)

*Twilight in the Wilderness* (1860)

Oil on canvas

101.6cm x 162.6cm

The Cleveland Museum of Art

#### *Figure 15*

**Joseph Beuys**

*Coyote: I like America and America Likes Me.* (1974)

Action at the Galerie René Block,

New York, 21-25 May 1974

Photography Lorraine Senna

#### *Figure 16*

**Christo and Jeanne-Claude**

*Wrapped Coast* (1969)

Erosion-control fabric, rope

93 sq. km

Little Bay, Australia

#### *Figure 17*

**Robert Smithson**

*Spiral Jetty* (1970)

Rocks, earth, salt crystals, water

6,783 tonnes earth. 1.450m; ø450

Great Salt Lake, Utah

#### *Figure 18*

**Michael Heizer**

*Double Negative* (1969-70)

244,800 tonne displacement

Rhyolite, sandstone

457 x 15 x 9 m

Mormon Mesa, Overton, Nevada

#### *Figure 19*

**Richard Long**

*Clearing a Path* (1998)

A Six Day Walk in the Hoggar, Sahara

*Figure 20*  
**Andy Goldsworthy**  
One of The Fifteen Drove Stones  
*Sheep Folds Project* (1996) Detail  
Dry Stone  
Casterton, Cumbria

*Figure 21*  
**Andy Goldsworthy**  
*IcePiece* 7-8/10-11 January (1987)  
Cibachrome photograph  
76 x 76cm  
Scaur Water, Penpont,  
Dumfriesshire, Scotland.

*Figure 22*  
**Jill Peck**  
*Undercurrent* (1999)  
Etched sandstone, marine stainless steel  
12 x 6 m  
Dorian Photographics

*Figure 23*  
**Aniko Meszaros, Sean Hanna, Donald Cowan**  
*Territories of Interwoven Genetic Design* (1999)  
Governor of Osaka Prefecture Prize.  
Osaka, Japan

*Figure 24*  
**Robert Gschwantner**  
*Erika* (2000)  
PVC tubing, motor oil  
Size unknown  
Photograph by Paolo Cipolina

## **Chapter 5**

### **My Project and its Component Artworks**

*Figure 25*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Ballast Trade 11* detail (1999)  
'Ballast Water Where To From Here' Conference  
Brisbane, March 1999.  
80 x 60cm

*Figure 26*  
**Jane Quon**  
*The Enemy Below: The Black Striped Mussel*  
*Invasion of Darwin* (1999)  
Performance, video, computer and sound  
Still image from video documentation

*Figure 27*

**Jane Quon**

*The Enemy Below: The Black Striped Mussel  
Invasion of Darwin* (1999)

Performance, video, computer and sound  
Still image from video documentation

*Figure 28*

**Jane Quon**

*The Enemy Below: The Black Striped Mussel  
Invasion of Darwin* (1999)

Performance, video, computer and sound  
Still image from video documentation

*Figure 29*

**Jane Quon**

*Fish School* (1999)

Inkjet on canvas  
123 x 172cm  
© Mick Baron

*Figure 30*

**Jane Quon**

*Jelly Tendril* (1999)

Inkjet on canvas  
123 x 172cm  
© Mick Baron

*Figure 31*

**Jane Quon**

*Comb Jelly* (1999)

Inkjet on canvas  
123 x 172cm  
© Mick Baron

*Figure 32*

**Jane Quon**

*Cloisonné Jelly* (1999)

Inkjet on canvas  
60 x 110cm  
© Mick Baron

*Figure 33*

**Jane Quon**

*Hand Fish* (1999)

47 x 65cm  
© Mick Baron

*Figure 34*

**Jane Quon**

*Sea of Tranquility – Moon Jelly* (1999)

Screenprint on paper  
47 x 65cm  
© Mick Baron

*Figure 35*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Rex Pyne: Total Eradication* (1999)  
Screenprint on paper (detail)  
65 x 47cm

*Figure 36*  
**Jane Quon**  
*It Will Never Be Fished ●ut* (1999)  
Mixed media print installation  
730cm (w) x 140cm (h) x 45cm (max. d)

*Figure 37*  
**Jane Quon**  
*It Will Never Be Fished ●ut* (1999) detail  
Mixed media print installation  
730cm (w) x 140cm (h) x 45cm (max. d)

*Figure 38*  
**Jane Quon**  
*It Will Never Be Fished ●ut* (1999) detail  
Mixed media print installation  
730cm (w) x 140cm (h) x 45cm (max. d)

*Figure 39*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Ecological Roulette* (2000)  
Wrest Point Conference Centre  
Sandy Bay, Hobart

*Figure 40*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Ecological Roulette* (2000)  
Wrest Point Conference Centre  
Sandy Bay, Hobart

*Figure 41*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Ecological Roulette* (2000)  
Wrest Point Conference Centre  
Sandy Bay, Hobart

*Figure 42*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Ballast Exchange* (2000)  
Mixed media installation,  
242cm (h) x 484cm (l) x 242cm (w)  
*photograph: L. Broughton*

*Figure 43*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Ballast Exchange* (2000)  
Mixed media installation,  
242cm (h) x 484cm (l) x 242cm (w)  
Multimedia sound and video projection (detail)



*Figure 44*  
**WC Piquenit** [1836-1914]  
*The Tower of Strength* (c1900)  
Watercolour and gouache  
35.7cm x 56cm  
Collection: Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery

*Figure 45*  
**Allan Sekula**  
*Containers used to contain shifting sand dunes* (1994)  
Veracruz  
Photograph size unknown

*Figure 46*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Pelagic Projections* (2001)  
National Science and Technology Centre  
Questacon  
Still image from exterior projection

*Figure 47*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Pelagic Projections* (2001)  
National Science and Technology Centre, Questacon  
Still image from exterior projection onto the 'drum'

*Figure 48*  
National Science and Technology Centre  
Questacon  
Photograph: Lindsay Broughton

*Figure 49*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Pelagic Projections* (2001)  
Still image from Exterior Projection,  
Film from *Ballast Exchange* (2000)  
National Science and Technology Centre  
Questacon

*Figure 50*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Pelagic Projections* (2001)  
Still image from 'Three in One' documentation  
National Science and Technology Centre  
Questacon

*Figure 51*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Pelagic Projections* (2001)  
Still image from central screen video  
National Science and Technology Centre  
Questacon

*Figure 52*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Marine Incursion* (2002)  
Movie still  
Duration 9min.

*Figure 53*  
**Jane Quon**  
*Marine Incursion* (2002)  
Movie still  
Duration 9min.

*Figure 54*  
**Jane Quon**  
*We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002)  
Mixed-media Marine Installation  
Waterman's Dock, Hobart.  
420cm x 450cm x (h) variable (28cmx120cm)

*Figure 55*  
**Jane Quon**  
*We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002)  
Mixed-media Marine Installation  
Waterman's Dock, Hobart.  
420cm x 450cm x (h) variable (28cmx120cm)

*Figure 56*  
**Jane Quon**  
*We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002)  
Mixed-media Marine Installation  
Waterman's Dock, Hobart.  
420cm x 450cm x (h) variable (28cmx120cm)

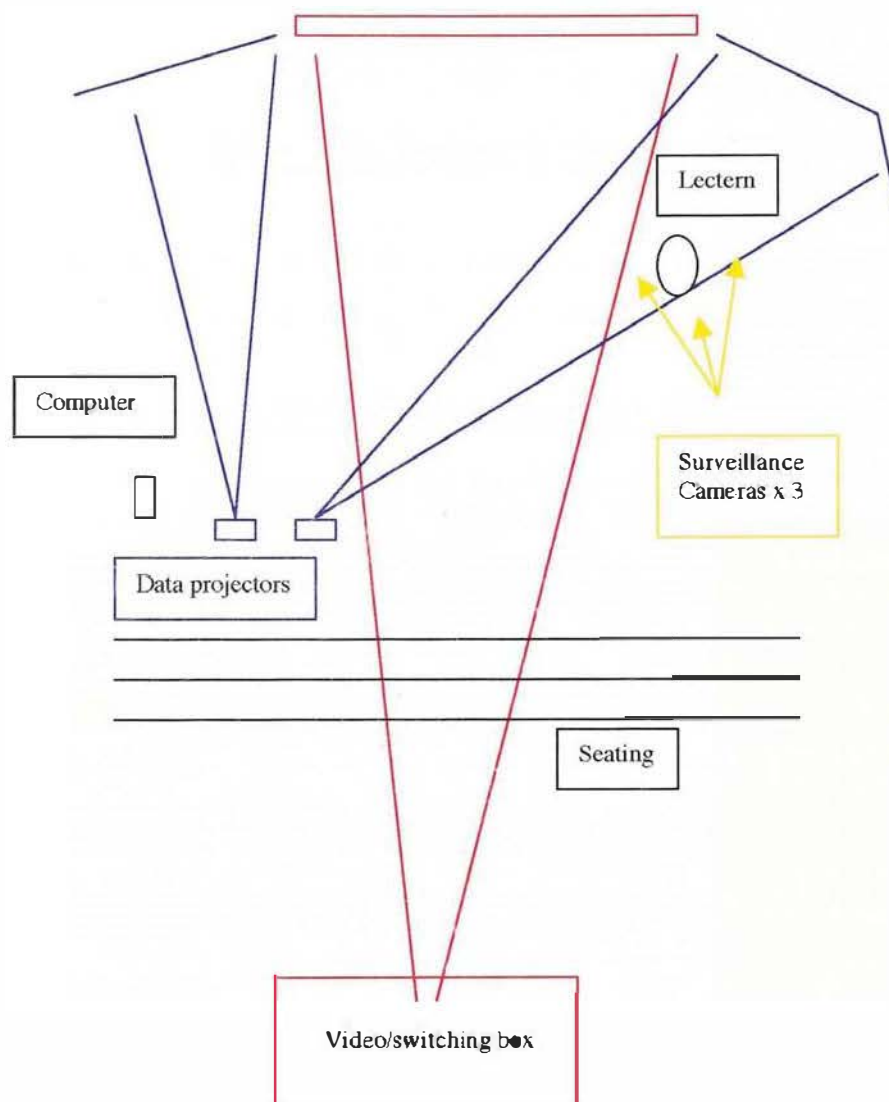
*Figure 57*  
**Jane Quon**  
*We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002)  
Mixed-media Marine Installation  
Waterman's Dock, Hobart.  
420cm x 450cm x (h) variable (28cmx120cm)

**APPENDIX 2:**  
**Materials used in**  
***The Enemy Below* (1999)**  
**and Scenario for Projection**

The following equipment was used: a G3 computer, with an additional computer card to project the image without the working screen; two data projectors; two projector screens; one overhead light; three black and white surveillance cameras; a video camera; a video camera tripod; one switch box; RCA cabling; and one video recorder. Several lots of pre-recorded sound were used.

The scenano for projection is presented diagrammatically below.

DECHANEUX THEATRE, CENTRE FOR THE ARTS.



### APPENDIX3:

#### Script for Artist's Talk *The Enemy Below* (1999)

What has the Black Striped Mussel invasion of Darwin got to do with Art? What role did artists play in this drama? What role could artists have played?

Let's step back and consider the broader question.

What is the role of the artist in society? Art is as old as humanity itself. Art is a fact of human life. Art takes diverse forms across diverse cultures.

Historically, in virtually all cultures, artists have served to reinforce, celebrate, educate and give pleasure to their communities: as John Dewey put it, art serves 'to consummate collective experience'.

The title of the book from which this quote is taken is *Art as Experience*. Dewey's proposition is that art is intimately bound up with the experience of the community as a whole - art should both reflect common experience and, at the same time, provide its host community with a special artistic experience – aesthetic experience.

Dewey's models for examining the role of art in society were 'traditional societies'. Such societies were considerably smaller and more homogeneous in terms of values, ethnicity, religion and quality of life than are the large, complex western societies of today.

Experience within modern society is incredibly diverse: so is the artistic vision and expression which reflects it. In common with their traditional forebears, however, contemporary western artists also hold a mirror up to society. But what they see is not harmony of values, ethnicity, religion etc. The experiences of western artists are not those they would wish to 'consummate' at all – they don't see what Mathew Arnold had dreamed that social experience might become: "all sweetness and light".

Confronted with the realities of the modern world the contemporary artist is more likely to be a critic than a celebrant of society.

We may not like it, but when contemporary artists throw back in our collective face those social contradictions which they perceive, they are only doing what artists have always done: representing their experience. In the words of Karrel Appel, "I paint like a barbarian - in a barbaric age".

Perhaps it is the critical stance of contemporary artists which has served to remove them from the centre of social life to the periphery – think of the public outrage at Serrano's *Piss Christ*. The artist is seen as an outsider, often as eccentric, or comical, and is even resented. Of course, many artists also see themselves as outsiders, and consider this, as I do, to be a morally valid stance.

Ironically, the forms of contemporary art often have tended to sterilise their content. The public is outraged by the art, rather than by any social deficiency the art may have exposed. It is a case of shooting the messenger and deflecting the urgency of the message.

As for me, I don't want my art to outrage people.  
I don't want it to alienate them.  
I want my art to seduce them.

Seduce? Well, I want my art to provide aesthetic satisfaction to its audiences. And aesthetic satisfaction is a kind of seduction. The word 'aesthetic' is from the Greek 'aesthetikos' meaning, in broad terms, 'heightened sensory experience'; 'experience above the ordinary'. Anthropologists call it 'affective response'. (We also use the word 'feeling' in relation to works of art. Hence 'anaesthetic' - the absence of feeling).

I believe that when a work of art generates aesthetic response in its audience it has established a fundamental condition for the effective communication of its message. Have not the photographs of our own Peter Dombrovskis achieved enormous public sympathy for wilderness because of their aesthetic power? These photographs did not have to be overtly didactic – they didn't have to ram the message down our throats to be effective – they simply had to be beautiful – and we got the message.

Broadly speaking the message my art seeks to convey is the critical need to preserve the marine ecosystem. Hence I describe myself as an ecological artist.

Ours is an ecosystem under intense and increasing pressure. We regularly hear of toxic algal blooms, of oil spills, of marine pests entering our waterways in ship ballast-water and on ship's hulls. The Black Striped Mussel and the North Pacific Seastar are cases in point – and now, astonishingly, we see the legal introduction of diseased Canadian salmon.

Preservation of the ecosystem is to me of paramount concern, but I am also deeply concerned, as a citizen, about the broad social issues and economic consequences of such events. Thus, I see my role very much as one with the other entities with major stakes in the issue of the quality of our waterways: with aquaculture, fisheries and tourist industries, for example; with science, and with relevant corporate, governmental and statutory bodies.

Much of my work is 'public art'; that is, it appears in other than regular art venues such as galleries. Such 'public art' actually takes the form of 'art events' of various kinds. This presentation tonight is one such event. Other quite different events are planned.

I've stated my belief in the power of the aesthetic dimension to lay the necessary foundation for the effective communication of meaning in art. As an adjunct to this, I believe very strongly in the aesthetic potential of new so-called multimedia art forms - digital computer imaging, video and the internet etc. These new forms have the capacity to communicate

powerfully with an audience and to reach huge new art audiences. Indeed, multimedia art has the potential to break down the walls of the 'sacrosanct' art gallery by presenting art at the cutting edge of contemporary practice in wider public settings.

Due to their highly technical nature, and the logistical challenges associated with their presentation, multimedia events inevitably require several artists working in collaboration, as a team. Exciting artistic results can flow from collaboration – consider what can happen when a jazz band improvises, or when an ensemble cast really gels during a theatrical performance on a particular night. In such cases, the artistic outcome is more than simply the sum of the parts. A new heightened level of artistic experience for all the collaborating artists is attained.

Within this collaborative mode, my role is akin to that of a theatrical director, or to the conductor in an orchestra. I imagine the whole, I produce 'script', and I direct the events – and I take responsibility for any disasters.

**APPENDIX 4:**  
**Materials and Equipment Used in**  
***It Will Never Be Fished Out (1999)***

A suite of eight panels, each 122cm x 210cm and located 30cm apart is used. Each panel consists of an image screen printed onto stainless steel mounted on medium-density fibreboard. At the top of each panel is a 30cm diameter circular hole. Within each hole is placed an image inkjet printed on 'back-lit' paper, sandwiched between perspex and back-lit by a halogen light.

Each of the panels weighs 7.5kg and sits on a 4mm thick perspex shelf (right angle profile) which projects 60mm from the wall. This shelf is mounted at a height of 135cm-150cm from the floor.

Each panel is suspended at an angle of approximately 20° and at a distance of 45cm at the top from the wall by 0.6mm flexible steel wire cables. The cables are attached in turn to the back of the panels converging into a single (5cm x 5cm x 0.6cm) steel plate (right angle profile) screwed into the wall. There is one wall mounted 5cm x 5cm x 0.6cm steel plate for each of the eight panels. Each wall-mounted plate is located 120cm-140cm above the perspex shelf.

Extending the full length of the suite and behind the panels, and extending an additional 20cm at each end (ie making a total of 730cm in length), runs a trapeze, consisting of two parallel 0.6mm flexible electrical cables 10cm apart.

Attached to the trapeze by crocodile clips are eight halogen globes (without reflectors), one globe behind the perspex circle (the hole) in each panel. By this means the digitally printed image sandwiched between two perspex panel at the back of the hole in each panel is back-lit. At the extreme right hand end of the trapeze is a transformer for power conversion to 12 volts. Thus for powering 8 halogen globes a single power source close to or concealed in the ceiling at the right hand end of the suite is required.

**APPENDIX5:**  
**Materials Used in**  
***Ballast Exchange* (2000)**  
**and Scenario for Projection**

The installation was developed as a response to the industrial nature of the site, the size of the room (14 metres x 8 metres x 5 metres high ceiling) and the fact that it was a room with no natural lighting.

The 'container' which was the core element of the installation, measuring 2.42m x 4.80m x 2.42m was constructed using 50mm industrial polystyrene foam sheathed in .6mm aluminium sheeting. Each unit measured 2.42m x 1.80m and was fitted within a channel top and bottom making the structure completely demountable and designed to fit on the flat tray of a utility truck. The end walls were constructed from two structural units, braced using steel wire and tensioned using turnbuckles. The end walls were erected and slipped into a corner profile before the side walls made from 4 units (back) and 3 units (front) completed the container's structure. Steel wire and marine boating shackles were used as tensioning for the side wall construction. During Bass Strait Forum 2000, the interior was painted in a non-reflective black paint, while the paint used for the floor (3mm medium-density fibreboard) was highly reflective. The 'high gloss' floor was used in combination with laminated green tinted glass tiles. The small tiles, 40cm x 33cm, created a grid pattern.

Two 50mm polystyrene foam screens were painted black and two white. This was a compromise solution to accommodate the imbalance in the strength of the anisilumens in the data projection. The placement of the screens and the reflective quality of the floor created a multi-dimensional viewing area within quite a small and restricted situation. Limited as it was by the confined space, by the placement of the screens and the interplay of the reflection on the floor, the serendipitous effect created by the two separate video screenings became central to the concept in subsequent work.

Still images from eight slide projections altered the architectural dimensions and emphasised the spatial ambiguity of the 'container'. The six still slide projectors also created ambient lighting within the

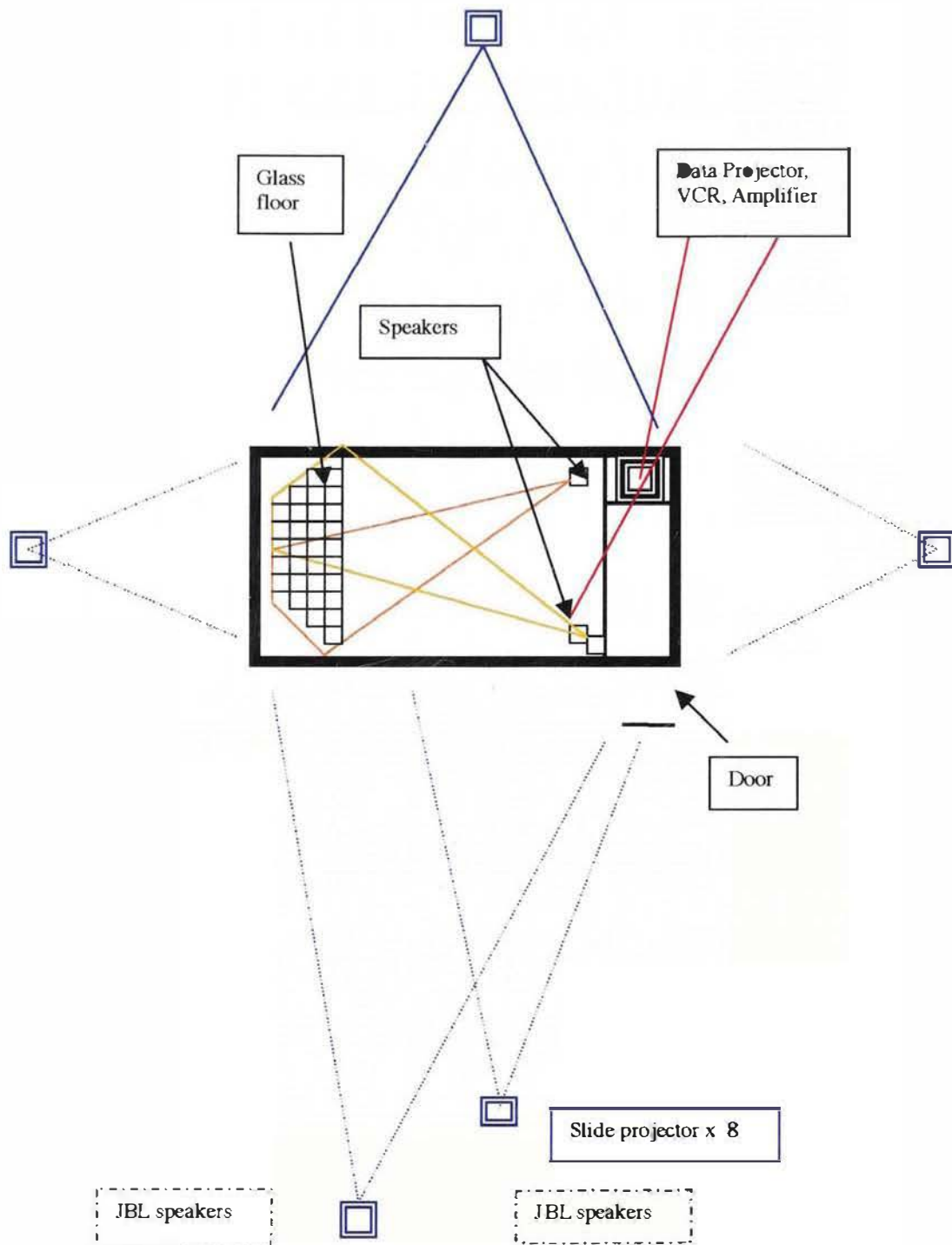


space. The projected images were scanned at a high resolution and were reformatted for projection.

Equipment included 2 x Data projectors; 2 x VCRs; 2 x JBL speakers; a 12 channel 'Mackie' mixer; 2 x interior speakers; an amplifier and 2 x mini CD players.

The scenario for projection is presented diagrammatically below.

INVERESK TRAMSHED, LAUNCESTON



**APPENDIX6:**  
**Equipment Used in**  
***Pelagic Projections (2001)***

The amount of equipment needed for *Pelagic Projections* was quite extensive, and is presented below in list form.

Data:

Sony FE-100 SXGA 3,000 ANSI Lumen projector (outside)  
Eiki Powerhouse 2200 ANSI Lumen (inside)  
Sony 1700 ANSI Lumen and Sony 1100 ANSI Lumen (both inside)  
G4 Mac Computers, with DVD capacity (x3)

Audio:

Electrovoice SX300 speakers (pair) (x3)  
SX200 speaker stand (pair) (x3)  
Dynachord 10ch mixer/amplifier

Lighting:

ETC 19 degree profile (x4)  
ETC S4 par (x10)  
Studio colour wash light m-version (x4)  
2.4k x 12ch dimmer rack (x12)  
Echelon 1k lighting console  
DD8 DMX splitter

Rigging Equipment:

Chain block (x2)  
CLS 3m x 300mm tri truss (x4)

Power:

25mm 3 phase extension

## APPENDIX 7:

**'The Old Mind and the Sea'**  
**Poem written by P. Hay for**  
***Marine Incursion (2002)***

### I

The earth's high child tugs molten tides about.  
Tidal fire, surging.

Comes cloud, boiling thick, viscous.  
Comes rain. Rain. Rain. The torn scar brims.

Granules of landsalt grit down to a coolant sea.  
*And darkness was upon the face of the deep.*

It is a miracle chemistry, and it holds.  
The earth's high child tugs saline tides about.

Life streams. Diatoms. Protozoa.  
Cells coalesce. Life streams.

Tentacled weed anchors the shallows.  
Slugs with fins walk out on everdead rock.

Life streams. Cells coalesce.  
Fins into legs. The terrible teeth of lizards.

Sea to land. Again to sea.  
Cells coalesce. Life streams.  
Landward.  
Seaward.

Tidal life.  
A streaming tide of life from, through, to, from mother-sea.

Gentling, cruel, nurturant, indifferent.  
Mother-sea.

### II

The sea is the primary mind's spirit level -  
It holds the surging physics trim.

The sea is the knowing mind's spirit level,  
and the planet's.

The sea is the mind's spirit leveller.

### III

We are aeons bound on trailing chains.  
They gather us in with plankton, albatross, whale...

We bled from the sea.  
On the sheer keel of science we flow back.

We flow back, armed and curious.  
We engage with invisible tides.

We reap what we do not sow.  
Impossibly vast, it eludes us.

We are alien. Poor things of air.  
Alien this fecund swirl. Fish out of water.

We offer the tainted fruit of our enterprise.  
We swing the species around.

We simplify.  
We make turbid what was clear.  
Much is gone.  
Much is going.  
But we swing the species about.  
Simplify things.  
Thus are they known.

#### **IV**

The mind wants boundaries.  
It sees a mantle without shape, a-stir  
with a great probe of life,  
life surfacing, flexing, burgeoning fit to burst.  
The mind wraps it the planet round,  
one vast molecular swarm,  
swollen, uncontained with life's first spring.  
It is without bounds, says the mind,  
and the mind demands beginnings,  
ends.

But here the sea-heat dwindles,  
and light, there, is lost  
to the dark in the sea canyon's heart,  
and currents shape the difference here,  
and there nutrients pool and cluster.  
Life changes, fractures, seeks an elemental niche –  
and sea-space takes a bounded form.

#### **V**

Do I go too far? Ask what should not be asked?

I would know your beginnings,  
mother-of-life, spirit leveller,  
giver of all and taker of all.

And your ends.

Do I forget myself?

**Pete Hay**

## APPENDIX 8:

### *E. Curriculum Vitae*

**Jane Quon B.F.A. (Hons.), T.D.A. Tasmania.,**

1971 Teachers Diploma of Art -Tasmanian School of Art  
1973 Tasmanian Teachers Certificate - Education Dept., Tasmania  
1997 Bachelor of Fine Art University of Tasmania  
1998 Bachelor of Fine Art (Hons. 1) University of Tasmania  
1999-02 PhD Research, (Tas. School of Art, University of Tasmania)

#### **Grants**

- CSIRO Grant and Commission CSIRO, Hobart 2002
- Hobart City Council Community Grant x 2
- Aquaculture Industry/University of Tasmania Grant 1999
- University of Tasmania Arts Faculty Scholarship 1999

#### **Commissions**

- Architectural Artworks the International Center for Living Aquatic Marine Resources Management, Penang, Malaysia, 2000. Ongoing.
- Temporary Public Installation for CSIRO's Marine Division, Hobart. August 2002. Completed.
- Video Installation Design for an exhibition of historical ecology in collaboration with David Peters, ecological cartographer, Department of Primary Industries, Water and the Environment, Tasmania, and Spanking Sound Productions. Ongoing.
- *Future Perfect*, a collaboration of artists and writers on the theme of 'exploring Tasmania's tomorrow'. For March 2003.

#### **Selected Solo Art Exhibitions**

*We Engage With Invisible Tides...* (2002)  
Waterman's Dock, Hobart.

*Marine Incursion* (2002)  
International Maritime Organisation, London.

*Pelagic Projections* (2001)  
National Science and Technology Centre, Canberra.

*Ballast Exchange* (2000)  
Inveresk Railyards, Launceston.

*Ecological Roulette* (2000)  
Wrest Point Hotel-Casino, Hobart.

*The Enemy Below: The Black Striped Mussel Invasion of Darwin* (1999)  
University of Tasmania Centre for the Arts, Hobart.

*Optimum Water Quality* (1999)  
Australian Ports and Marine Authority, Brisbane.

*Ballast Water* (1998)  
Canberra.

Ballast Blooms (1998)  
CSIRO, Marine Division, Hobart.

#### **Selected Group Exhibitions**

*Ecological Manipulations* (1999). Carnegie Gallery, Hobart.

*A Flourishing Ecology* (1998) Long Gallery, Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart.

#### **Commentaries**

- Broughton, L. (1999), The Ecological Art of Jane Quon. In *40° South: Tasmania and Beyond*. Issue 15, Summer, 2000. pp 8-10.
- Hay, P. (2001), Dinoflagellates and Art: Jane Quon's Marine Installations. In *Artlink: Taking in Water*. Vol.21(1), 2001. pp19-21.
- Broughton, L. (2001), Pelagic Space. In *mêtis-Wasted*, Exhibition Catalogue Essay.
- Hallegraeff, G. (2002), Untitled Exhibition Catalogue Essay, *We Engage With Invisible Tides...*
- Hay, P. (2002), We Engage With Invisible Tides...Exhibition Catalogue Essay, *We Engage With Invisible Tides...*
- Taylor, P. (2002), Marine Installation. Exhibition Catalogue Essay, *We Engage With Invisible Tides...*